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THE BRIDE'S HERO

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BY
M. P. REVERE

ILLUSTRATED BY A G LEARNED



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September, 1912

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SAN FRANCISCO, *April 7th.*

I AM twenty-one to-day, and things are going to happen. The smallest thing, but important to me, is that I'm beginning a new volume of my Self-Book.

This new book is beautiful. I bought it for a birthday present, and I've put on a thick, creamy, expensive-looking fly-leaf, "To Sandra Phayre, on her twenty-first birthday; from her affectionate self." I have always so wanted to be called Sandra, instead of Sandy, which is a hateful nickname. But no one ever does say Sandra! The book locks up with a gold key, like the bangle Jimmy McLean gave my cousin Marguerite, which got on her nerves, and made her have hysterics one night because she could n't get it off.

That was the first year I was sent to boarding-school in New York with her, and she was fifteen and I was twelve; but now she has slipped back in the count of time and is only three months older than I am instead of the three years she was so proud of then. I hope it is n't mean of me to write that. Nobody is likely to see what I write here, except myself; and it would be no fun to keep a book like this if I could n't put down everything about everybody as it comes into my head.

I suppose it was silly, but scribbling has been a great comfort to me, and all these nine years I've gone on

writing down the things, though often I miss out days and weeks.

Funny! It was on my twelfth birthday I started the book; nine years ago to-day. And this is the third volume; but the first two are very fat ones. I bought them big, because years seemed so long in those days.

Both volumes are here in my writing-desk. I was looking them over a little before beginning this. I never called my book a diary; one hears so much fun being made of girls who keep diaries. But then, most girls have some one to whom they can go and tell their troubles, or the fun they have, or to ask advice. I have nobody at all, for any one who knows Aunt Dora would know I could n't say things I really care for in my heart to her.

My first volume I called "Letters to my Darling Mother." I wonder what Aunt Dora would say if she saw that inscription? She would think something was very wrong with my head. Oh, how glad I am she 'll never know about my books! How glad I am that I shan't really have to hear her say anything about them! For it's hopeless arguing with Aunt Dora. You begin a subject, and she snaps you up with a snubby sort of answer that finishes the matter — and you at the same time, making you feel a Worm. Only, of course, she hardly ever does it to Marguerite, or to new acquaintances; only to people she is tired of, and impatient with, like me.

I used to feel, somehow, as if my mother might come back and read those letters of mine to her, maybe while I was asleep. I used always to imagine myself asking her advice about things, and then I'd dream that she told me what I ought to do, or comforted me when I was miserable.

I never had time to know my mother very well, or she me, in this world, because she died before I was three. But sometimes, in flashes, it seems as if I can remember her. I distinctly see a beautiful young face, close to mine, bending over me when I'm in bed. It is a small oval face, without much color, and it has a sweet, curved mouth, the upper lip shaped like a bow. The eyes are gray, the color of slate, with golden brown spots round the pupils; and they look at me from under long, dark lashes that curl up softly. I can see her little, delicate nose, with sensitive nostrils. and her brown hair parted in the middle, and spraying into what I like to call "love locks" over her forehead. It's a pretty word, and one finds it in poetry or old-fashioned stories about sweet heroines of other times; so it seems to suit my mother, for I think of her as being rather old-fashioned, or, anyhow, not hard and brilliant like the mothers of a great many girls I know — especially not at all like Aunt Dora, who says I am old-fashioned.

Once I was silly enough to remark before her, that I was sure I could remember my mother; and when she said I could n't possibly do so, I went on to describe the face that comes before my eyes in those illuminating flashes. But Aunt Dora and Marguerite both laughed, till my cheeks felt as if picnic fires had been built on them. They thought I was describing myself, as I imagined myself to be.

"You've heard that you look like your mother," said Aunt Dora, "and you've gazed at your face in the glass, till you call up your own image, and fancy you're calling up hers. Take care you don't get to be neurotic and hysterical. It's true you do look a little like your mother. But she was very pretty, and you

never will be. So you must try to be sensible instead, and make up that way."

I always used to dislike and be almost afraid of girls I heard spoken of as "sensible"; but since Aunt Dora said that to me, I'm sorry for them. I suppose they're only trying to make up, poor dears, for everything charming they would have liked to be, and could n't. But I don't try much to make myself different. Still, I do wish Aunt Dora would n't say that it does n't matter whether a girl as rich as I am is good-looking or not; because, if I were very pretty and fascinating, like Marguerite, I could be quite happy, feeling that people cared about me for my own sake. As it is, when I do stop to think about the money, it frightens me, and makes me rather unhappy. It is a great pity Marguerite has n't got as much as I have, and she thinks so too. But I should love to give it to her, if father's will had n't stated exactly what he wanted to be done for his sister, Aunt Dora, and her daughter Marguerite. Anyhow, father left her only five thousand dollars a year, and Marguerite one thousand for herself, while I have an income of a hundred and fifty thousand, and am forbidden to give them a penny. Luckily, I can make them presents of jewelry and clothes, and such things, which of course I love to do; though it would be a little pleasanter if Aunt Dora did n't always behave as if I were twitting her with poverty.

Although my father lived till I was nearly twelve (I was n't sent to boarding-school till he died), I don't feel that I knew him intimately; whereas I seem to know just what my mother was like. I think my father could n't have been an easy man to know; and then, he was very busy always, making more and

more money. You see, he was n't one among many James Phayres. He was "*the* Phayre." But he was always kind. I remember how he used to call me to come to him. Then he would lay his hand on my head, and it would get heavier and heavier, for probably he forgot it was there, in absent-mindedness, and let it lie with all its weight. He would gaze at me, and say nothing, for a long time, or what seemed a long time; and I would feel embarrassed, not knowing if he expected me to talk prettily to him, and make conversation. I believe now, in looking back, he must have fallen into thinking about my mother, when he stared through me like that. He had a high, square forehead, with the hair beginning to get thin and lose its strong black color. His eyes were deep set, his chin prominent, and his cheeks slightly hollow. It must have been a strong, good face, one to rely upon; but I was a tiny bit afraid of him; so that was the reason I wrote that volume of letters from school to my darling mother (whom I knew for only two years and a half before she left this world), and never to my father.

It was the next volume, after the one with the letters, which I began to call the "Self-Book"; but now, when I come to read over bits of it, I find a lot more about other people than about myself. Still, they're all connected with me and my life, directly or indirectly, except the one there's most about — the "hero," as he would have to be called if I'd been writing a story. Only I could n't have put him properly into the story, if there'd been one, because I never saw him, and probably never shall see him, except in fancy. But would n't it be wonderful if I should meet him, in England, where we are going — Aunt Dora and Marguerite and I? He's there now, I know, for I read

in a paper the other day that he 'd come home from India. Usually there is n't very much in San Francisco papers about people and things in other countries. But somehow he is still every one's hero, as well as mine, and of course people over here are interested because he's American on his mother's side. I see in the old book I always spelled "Him" with a capital; but I was very young and silly when I began to do that, and I must stop it in this volume, if only to remind myself that I've come of age. It seems rather treacherous to the Past not to mention him at all, however, and I don't see why I should n't speak of him now and then. Perhaps it's better to be sentimental about a splendid man, especially when you don't know him and can't behave like an idiot even if you'd like to, than to play at being in love with somebody you do know, and flirt with him, and then be sorry and disgusted with yourself afterward, when you meet the Right One.

If there is any Right One for me in this world, he'll have to be of Sir Miles Culver's type, more or less. I'm afraid *less*, for there can't be many in the world really as splendid as Sir Miles; but "small favors thankfully received," is a motto I've so often heard from dear old Miss Timpson that I've practically been brought up on it. Not that I *like* it as a motto. My favorite one would be, if I let myself go, "All or nothing; the highest or none." But I'm afraid that would n't be a good working, everyday motto for a girl like me, who is n't a beauty, or wonderful in any way — that is, if such a girl wants to be happy. I want it so much! I think one could only be it, though, if one had first been able to make everybody around one happy.

Last Wednesday, at the good-bye lunch Mrs. Paul Wright gave for Marguerite and me, I met a woman who actually knows Sir Miles Culver. She sat next to me, and I don't know whether I liked her or not, but she was fascinating. She is an English authoress, and very important, though Aunt Dora has told me that we're not on any account to read her latest book.

I think Mrs. Wright put me by the celebrity because we're just going to England for the first time; and the lady seemed to take a sort of interest in me. Her name is Mrs. Lane, and she's visiting the Delaneys — the rich one's, not the poor cousins, who are much nicer really. She's come to America to take notes of us all, and write a book; and she says impertinent things, but in such a sweet way, with a voice like cream, you can't help laughing instead of being cross. She bends down her head, and then looks up from under her eyebrows, straight at you, in the most effective way, talking very slowly and gently, which compels you to listen closely to every word she says.

"So you're going to England?" she asked, looking at me with her greenish eyes, which she must like, because she invariably gives her best heroines the same. And they always have very white faces, like hers, though she allows them different colored hair occasionally; otherwise, I suppose the critics would say that she could write only about one type of woman — her own.

I replied that I was going, in a few days, with my aunt and cousin, with whom I lived.

"You mean, they live with you, don't you?" she corrected me, with one of her faint, mysterious smiles. And that is the sort of thing I mean, when I say she is

impertinent in a sweet way that you can't exactly resent.

"Is n't it precisely the same?" I wanted to know.

"I wonder if your aunt and cousin feel it so?" she said; and when I blurted out that I hoped they did, and blushed, she changed the subject to one almost worse. "I wonder which of our dukes, marquises or earls will fall a victim to you next season?" she murmured, in her lovely voice.

I do wish I could get over the habit of blushing. I sent for a cure advertised in a newspaper, when I was at school, but it was idiotic and no good at all.

I felt silly and schoolgirlish; and stammered that probably I should n't meet any creatures of the sort, or if I did, they would take no notice of me.

By that time, to my horror, every one was listening, because people hang on Mrs. Lane's words, as she is considered very witty. And of course they all knew that she might begin scintillating at any minute, even at a females' luncheon! Unfortunately, Marguerite, who sat opposite, had heard; and she never has any mercy on me before other people, though she is sweet sometimes when we're alone together.

"Sandy has a hero already in England," she said, in a loud tone.

"Please, Marguerite, don't!" I could n't help imploring. "I think you are horrid to make me out so silly."

Perhaps she was a tiny bit sorry for me then, or else did n't wish to be catty. Anyhow, though she went on, she modified the crudeness of her statement a little.

"Oh, we all had heroes at school," she explained. "Sandy was no worse than the rest of the girls.

But most of us took actors, for we were allowed to go to matinées of all the improving sort of plays. We chose men to worship, you see; grown up ones, like favorite actors; or very handsome clergymen; or soldiers, or explorers, or prize-fighters, or racing motorists, or men who invented airships (there were n't any aeroplanes then); but ours were all Americans, except Sandy's. She chose an Englishman; and some of the girls who were down on the British tossed her in a blanket one night because she was a traitor to her country. It was an old blanket, and tossing her tore a great hole in the middle, so she came through with an awful bump on the floor, and three of the teachers rushed up to see if the heavens had fallen."

"But it was only a child angel!" cut in Mrs. Lane, smiling quite kindly at me. "And a martyr," she added.

"I was just twelve," I apologized. "It's very mean of Marguerite to tell."

"As she has told, she must really go on and give us the name of the Hero for whom you suffered these persecutions," said Mrs. Wright.

"Sir Miles Culver," answered Marguerite promptly, looking defiantly across the table at me. I'd hoped that she had forgotten.

"That was ten years ago," she went on. "And you know how, after the Boer war, and Sir Miles Culver had been everybody's hero in the siege of Ladysackett, they sent him to India to stop some mutiny or other, because he had his first soldiering there, and could speak several weird dialects, and was supposed to understand Indian nature. There was a big fuss about him, even in our American

papers just then, because he stood at the top of some steps somewhere, goodness remembers where (unless Sandy does), and quelled a native rising, unarmed. His pictures were in all the magazines and papers; Sandy cut one out of a weekly paper, and not at all bad. She had it in a frame, and used to keep it in her handkerchief-case. I know, because I roomed with her. I'm sure she's got that picture to this day."

"Have you?" asked Mrs. Lane.

"I wonder?" I murmured. "It must be faded by this time." Which was really diplomatic of me, if I do say it myself, and showed presence of mind. It would have been namby-pamby to confess, yet I could n't bear to tell a fib about *his* picture. It would have felt disloyal to do that.

"You may meet him in England," she said, "though it's not so likely as that you'll meet all the unmarried dukes who are hanging about. Sir Miles Culver does n't 'hang about,' although he's 'on his own,' just now, as there's no command at present worth offering such a hero, who is still only a colonel. He's supposed to have a mind above women. If he ever does care about a woman, it will probably go hard with him. I fancy he's that sort of man, though I know him only a little, and I'm bound to confess, as far as I myself am concerned, he's among my few failures. Still, I should think he could be interesting, if he chose, though not pleasant to live with. Too intense and serious to let one play with him prettily, and with a very good conceit of himself, some people say. There's another thing I've heard said of Sir Miles Culver: that he's a good friend — to a few; a merely tolerable acquaintance; a disappointing enemy, except in war, because too indifferent to hit back; and

that he would make a horrible husband, without giving a woman the satisfaction of being able to free herself from him. If you make his acquaintance, Miss Phayre, you may perhaps find out whether some of these sayings are true. In any case, I'm sure you'll agree with me about one thing; your noble hero has an air of regarding this poor, dear, amusing little world from an amazingly Olympian point of view."

Just then we were coming near the end of lunch, and with the ice-cream there was a wonderful cake in honor of Marguerite and me; and on the top of the cake was a fascinating model of a big ocean liner with lots of funnels; and round the side "Bon Voyage" in letters made of little sugar roses. Mrs. Wright interrupted the conversation to explain that in the cake were presents of jewelry. Of course, such an exciting announcement turned the conversation instantly from Sir Miles Culver to the cake, and I was never gladder of anything in my life. We all got beautiful things: Marguerite a platinum pendant with a spider-web and a spider with a fat turquoise body; and I had a diamond heart, because the diamond is the birthstone for April. Mrs. Wright explained this to everybody, so that no one could be offended, because my present was the nicest of all — except Mrs. Lane's, who had an emerald ring, her favorite jewel. But afterward Marguerite said that I was given the best because I was the richest, and people always curried favor with the rich, even if they were rich themselves, like Mrs. Wright. And Aunt Dora quoted out of Proverbs, "the destruction of the poor is their poverty." She loves that quotation. I wish she did n't. It makes me feel guilty somehow. And anyway it was n't appropriate to the pendant, because it can't destroy you to

have a turquoise spider instead of a diamond heart. Besides, next day I bought a heart for Marguerite, better than mine. So it is now all right. Her birthday is in September, but she thinks diamonds appropriate for all months.

Luckily no one began to talk of Sir Miles Culver again at luncheon; but yesterday I had a letter from Mrs. Lane — quite a nice amusing letter, enclosing an introduction for us all three to a friend of hers in England, Lady Meldon. “She is n’t what you’d call ‘smart’ or ‘up-to-date’” (I would n’t call my worst enemy either, for I hate the expressions!), Mrs. Lane wrote; “but I feel sure you will like her, and I particularly want you to meet. Without an introduction, you probably would n’t, for Lady Meldon is n’t much in the gay set, where Americans find themselves. She’s a widow, and when she’s in London, lives with her brother, on Chelsea Embankment, in a charming house with a Whistler view. Her own place is in Surrey, old, and interesting, though not grand; and her friends are interesting too. I wish I were going to be at home, to see how you get on together, and all that comes of the acquaintance, but I shan’t finish California till the season in London is nearly over; and after that, one of your dear delightful millionaires is arranging a party for me to visit the Yellowstone.”

I suppose this kindness was to make up for the teasing the other day. The letter of introduction is for me, though it mentions Aunt Dora and Marguerite; and I have a feeling that I shall like to use it, if only to see the house with the “Whistler view”!

As I write, I can hear Miss Timpson in my bedroom next door, singing in a high voice that cracks at the most important trills.

Dear old Miss Timpson! She's dreadfully despondent and evilly prophetic now, because we're going to Europe. Of course she's going too. I could n't bear to go anywhere without her for long, and she lost pounds of flesh while I was at boarding-school in New York, though I wrote to her twice a week. And I'm sure she'd rather be slowly brought to the boil, like a lobster, than let me sail without her; but she has the most deadly ideas of Europe, and says it's "effete," whatever that means. She would n't mind if it were the Holy Land, for that would be a pilgrimage; but she thinks the Scarlet Woman dwells in Europe, especially pervading Paris, yet not neglecting London.

Marguerite says I'm silly and sentimental to keep such a person on as a maid; that it was bad enough to have had so cantankerous a creature for a nurse, but that as a maid I should do better to employ an intelligent cat. Also, that it's "simply ridiculous to call the woman Miss Timpson." I should say "Timpson" or call her by her Christian name. Marguerite perhaps does n't know that I should die of terror if I tried to address my respected monitor as "Timpson," or of laughing if I attempted "Hepsibah." That sounds like a hiccough!

This is one of the things which proves Marguerite right, I suppose, in saying I'm old-fashioned, and that I love to stick to old, worn-out things, when I ought to have new ones. Not that Miss Timpson is worn out. Far from it, thank goodness! Long may she wave, as she has waved over me the flag of authority ever since I was a month old, and my first nurse went. She often speaks about this remote period of history, and what a wisp of a thing I was; but though she

must have had the happiness of seeing my sweet mother every day for over two years, I never could get Miss Timpson to talk much about her. I think I know why: because the good creature hates to be sentimental, and I'm sure she's afraid of crying. I heard Aunt Dora say once, "Cassandra was the only human being that dreadful woman was never impudent to." And Aunt Dora tried to discharge Miss Timpson, it seems, when I was about five, but I yelled for days, and refused to eat, so father said she was to stay.

I think Miss Timpson must have been about forty when she came to us, for she can't be more than sixty now, she is so active and fresh. But to me she does n't seem changed since my earliest recollection of her sharp manners, her independent ways, her beady black eyes, her carrot-colored hair with hardly any gray, her uncompromising shape, which can hardly be called a figure; and her headaches of which she appears as proud as some ladies of their nerves. She always winds up her head in a towel when these arrive, and refuses to speak, even to answer questions, for twenty-four hours, though she gets through her work just the same. And to try and make conversation with Miss Timpson afflicted by a headache would be like patting a thundercloud, or chucking an earthquake under the chin.

Since I came back from boarding-school, I've never been out of California. When our house was burned down in the fire, I was quite a little girl, and still in New York at Madame Weir's. When Aunt Dora brought Marguerite and me home, later, it was to live in a hotel; but we have such a big suite of rooms and have been in it so long now, it seems like our own

house. Besides, the hotel is on the very same hill where we used to live, and it has the same view — oh, such a wonderful view! I can't believe I shall see anything as wonderful in Europe, not even in Rome, if we go there — though Mrs. Lane said the other day that San Francisco, with all its hills, struck her as being like a new Rome, set down by the sea.

Through the window of my sitting-room I can look out to the Golden Gate, and to our dear mountain we all love so much, Mount Tamalpais, which we never call anything but just "the mountain," though there is Mount Diabolo, to be seen quite clearly. How I shall miss the fog pouring in, like an air-tide, rose and gold, and pale lilac, or gray — the gray of a gull's wings, never dull or leaden, at least never to my eyes.

My dear sitting-room, too, I shall miss, for its own sake as well as the view; for I've loved it, and taken as much pains in "dressing it up," as Miss Timpson says, "as if it were a doll's house."

I shall miss the steep hills, and the tall new skyscrapers and the little old, pre-fire buildings which mix with the grand new ones so incongruously yet interestingly. Most of all, I shall miss my good, warm-hearted friends, who say they're sorry I'm going, and hope I'll "come back just the same, not changed a bit for better or worse." For I do think that Californians are the sweetest people I've met so far, though that may be prejudice, as California is my home. Of course, as mother was a Virginian, I'm sure I should love Virginians, if I knew any. As for English people, only a few have come my way, and most of these were rather patronizing, or else they complained, because they failed to make the money they expected to pick up like dirt in the West. Still,

I'm delighted to be going over to their side and I'm quite prepared to like them, though not as I like Californians.

My father's will forbade me to travel abroad till after my twenty-first birthday; and we are starting the very day after! Aunt Dora says that he wanted me to know my own country and countrymen before seeing others, so as not to be dazzled by dukes, and let his money be snapped up by unworthy foreigners. Funny, how they all seem to think dukes will want to know me! I'm sure they won't. Nearly every English duke is married, anyhow, Mrs. Lane says; which is just as well, if they're anything like what they are on the stage—idiots or brutes. But then, on the stage, baronets, though brilliant, are invariably villains, which can't be true, because Sir Miles Culver is a baronet; "Colonel Sir Miles Culver." I'm glad they have the sense to put the army title first.

THE ADRIATIC, *April 16th.*

It is splendid being on a big ship. This one is enormous. I take walks on the deck, alone, because Marguerite is n't feeling well, and I seem to go endless miles. The only thing I don't like is, that the long rows of pale people sitting in deck-chairs stare at your feet, as if something were wrong with them, and I know that nothing is wrong with mine. I'm quite conceited about my feet! Or else they look at your hair, or the shape of your nose, in a marked way, and you feel they're straining their brains to make up some appropriate nickname.

Marguerite says that people stare because I am rich. I should like to retort with some quite disagreeable

remark (though probably I'd be sorry afterward), only there is nothing disagreeable one could say with truth to Marguerite about her looks, except about her trick of putting powder on her nose if it gets cold or red, and making it turn a faint heliotrope. Marguerite looks entirely suitable for the heroine of a novel — a new-fashioned novel, where the girls are very tall. She has brown hair, but a different brown from mine, where you think of the brown quality first. Every one, unless a jealous cat, would describe Marguerite's as golden brown; and though it is n't nearly as long as mine, and does n't wave naturally, it gives far more effect, because Annette, the French maid shared by her and Aunt Dora, "marcelles" it beautifully, with the waves in precisely the places where a lovesick poet would most desire to see them. Her eyes are brown, too, almost the same shade as her hair; and her eyebrows and lashes so much darker, that, with her fair skin and gorgeous color, her hair looks almost yellow — which is better than *being* yellow, she says, because less obvious.

Marguerite has a perfect figure, the kind that looks in the fashion whatever the style is, and either rounds out or is flat according to what is fancied at the moment; but whatever it does, it does in just the right way. Marguerite can be very agreeable, and studies up witty things to say. She reads books on purpose to talk about them intelligently. It's wonderful how she brings in the things she's just read, as if she'd been born knowing them. It's an art, she says.

Marguerite is n't a bit like Aunt Dora in any way, but is supposed to be the image of her father, who died before I was born and left Aunt Dora rather poor. Aunt Dora was n't young when she married, and could

never have been pretty, but she seems to feel herself above mere looks. She is quite small and thin, yet she has a strong will, and a strong face, like a man's. Her nose is large, with very light blue eyes set rather close to it, and it has been drooping nearer and nearer to her chin ever since I can remember. And when she seems to be sitting perfectly still, she creaks in a stiff, silky way, that I have tried myself as an experiment, but can't manage. One thing she often says, is: "I'm an extremely truthful woman," and immediately your heart sinks, for you know she is going to tell you something unpleasant about yourself. Yet, it is very odd, she seems ready to grant moral concessions where she and Marguerite are concerned. When it is for their own benefit, she alters facts in a way I fear she would disapprove in others. So, apparently, it is necessary to be strictly truthful only about friends, and especially relations, when their souls must be saved by their feelings being hurt. The one contradictory quality in Aunt Dora is her voice, which is quite young and high-pitched, like a child's; and anybody who heard it before seeing her sail round the corner would be very much surprised at sight of her.

She went to Europe on her wedding-trip, and has often complained because it has been her duty since then to remain in America watching over me, until my coming of age; but already she is beginning to praise her native land, and our national traits and customs. I don't think she likes the sea. She has snubbed several people on board, who have asked her to play bridge. "I am glad to say, I believe my mind to be on a level above bridge," she replied to a timid invitation from a dear little man who is like a white poodle. Afterward, however, when she heard that

he is Lord Venner, the great scientist, who has just been so fêted in New York, she showed symptoms of remorse. He has not dared to venture near her again, although she conspicuously reads a book written by him, which she found in the ship's library, but he talks to Marguerite and me — never about anything scientific, unless porpoises come under that head.

Lord Venner is kind to me, and says he would like to meet me again after I have been a year in England. I told him I should n't stay so long. But he said, "Who knows?"

We have met a few young men, nice boys, who are just as pleasant to me as to Marguerite, though she is so lovely; and I do think it good of them. Sometimes I believe that I should like to know how to flirt. Marguerite does it exquisitely. I should be half afraid men were laughing at me if I tried to flirt with them. Unless flirting is managed with great skill it is rather disgusting.

To-night a concert is to be given on board, and worried-looking people are running around, beseeching every one over ten or under a hundred to "do something." Marguerite said, "I have no tricks," though she dances beautifully, Spanish dances, and some Greek ones, for which she's taking her costumes to Europe. But she told me afterward, when I asked her why she refused, that there was no one on board worth fussing about. She just wanted to have a quiet interval and rest her features before plunging into the London season. All the same, she told the worried people they might persuade me to sing, though she knows how I hate singing before strangers. I have only a little voice — what she calls a "pleasant, twilight voice" — anyhow; and although I like noth-

ing better than singing to myself, and can even sing rather well in a modest way, if strangers aren't listening, I always make the most dismal failure if forced to lift up my voice in company. I am quite sick with dread, a sickness worse than seasickness, I'm sure; but Miss Timpson says it is not: nothing could be worse, except the knowledge of mortal sin. And the thing is, not to be weak, and give up to either.

LONDON, *May 7th.*

It's a month to-day since I began this new volume. Now the day when I wrote the first words seems longer ago than many things that happened when I was a child.

We have been in France, for we landed at Cherbourg, and stayed in Paris, seeing a few sights, and collecting quantities of hats and dresses. There were crowds of places I wanted to see; but Aunt Dora says she can't bear to behave like a tourist, and Marguerite never did like history. I wonder why we came to Europe, forsooth? But I mustn't grumble, for everything is enchanting. And you can see the really worth-while things with one eye, so to speak, while you try on hats with the other.

Paris suited Marguerite exactly. She might have lived there in another state of existence, for she seemed to know just where to go to buy everything. She has the most lovely clothes, which she persuaded the dressmakers to get ready for her in a hurry, even though they exclaimed, "Mais, Mademoiselle, c'est impossible!" with emphatic gestures, and voices up in the high C. As for me, I got very little, but it does n't matter a bit.

Marguerite wears no petticoat in these days. She has silk tights. And they, and her corsets, with a wisp of embroidered silk to protect it, and her stockings, are the same color as whatever dress she wears; consequently she has to have a good many of such things. She has been struck with the conviction since arriving in Paris, that it's more sincere to have your underneath things the same color as your gown; and so, if it is sincere, it is right.

Now we are at the Savoy Hotel, which is beautiful and fascinating, just as good as the best of our own American hotels, and that's paying it a great compliment. But it is more interesting than most of ours, because one sees people from all countries. We have rooms looking out over a garden and the Thames. The view changes every minute, and is so Whistlery, that as soon as I saw it I was reminded of that Lady Meldon whom Mrs. Lane wanted me to meet. Of course we have lots of other letters of introduction, too, some to people Marguerite is particularly anxious to know, because she says they are the ones who "really matter."

"They've all got titles," she announced. Marguerite feels that titles give more variety to social life than plain Misters and Missuses, *ad infinitum*, can give. She is not keen, however, to know knights or their families, because knights may have risen from mayorhood or even sheriffhood; or they may have made soap, which is not what you come all the way from America to meet!

Lady Meldon is a knight's widow. Marguerite found that out in a Red Book which is a kind of detective list that betrays the nobility's age. She looked to see whether she wanted to meet Lady

Meldon or not; and thought, when she knew the worst, that, although Sir George Meldon had been a general, his widow would n't be worth bothering about — especially as the name "Chelsea Embankment" rings damp as well as dull. But somehow or other I could n't give up Lady Meldon, and I have sent a note, with Mrs. Lane's letter, asking if she will call, or if she will let me go to see her. The most charming note has come back, saying that she is not very well; and will I have tea with her, quite by herself, this afternoon? Marguerite thinks it sounds deadly, but I am looking forward to going. I feel as if I were just about to knock at a door, which will fly open and show me something dear and precious, something I would n't miss for the world. I believe in instinct, just as Miss Timpson believes in the "feelings in her bones." There is a sense of mystery and joy in listening to the voice that sometimes speaks in a whisper, deep down in yourself. If you don't care to listen, it soon stops. But if you do, it is like a chime of fairy bells, calling you to a fairy wedding. And if, after all, you don't get to the wedding, it is not the fault of the bells, but of yourself, for stupidly missing the way, or being too late. And anyhow you have had the thrill of the bells. That's why I always listen to the voice when I catch the faintest whisper.

May 7th, Night.

I have been to Lady Meldon's, and — No, I'm going to begin at the beginning, so that some day I may read this over, and see it all, just as it happened.

I went alone to Chelsea Embankment. I wanted to make myself look nice, because Lady Meldon had written such a kind note to Mrs. Lane's "friend,"

that I did n't want her to suffer too severe a shock of disappointment, at first sight. I put on a white dress, covered with Irish lace, that Marguerite helped me to choose in Paris, and a drooping Leghorn hat, dripping roses. It was the first time I'd worn these things, and when I came to see myself in them, I thought I'd never looked so insignificant, and I did n't see why, because the dress and hat were both perfect. Yet Miss Timpson saw, in a second. She does n't encourage me to be lazy, so I have to do my own hair, and dress myself (I would n't dream of letting the poor old dear button or lace my shoes), but she does condescend to hook my clothes when they fasten behind.

"You ain't *you* in those things," she remarked, in her brusque tones.

And that was exactly it! She'd answered the question I could n't answer myself.

"Don't you think they're pretty?" I asked.

"They'd be right enough on Marguerite." (Catch her American independence giving one of us a "Miss"! "*She* could show 'em off. You can't, no more than that little rag doll you used to call 'Jane,' could show off the clothes of that French beauty with the yellow curls, you had — Marry Antinette. If you want *my* advice, you'll give this truck to Marguerite."

"The dress would n't be half big enough."

"Trust her to make that Frenchwoman of hers alter it. I guess real lace won't go begging. And 't is n't the first time this has come to pass, when you've been weak enough to let Marguerite choose your clothes."

Meekly I changed into my pale gray cloth, with the neat gray hat that matches; and so it was that I arrived at Lady Meldon's.

The house is set back in a tiny strip of garden, overlooking the "Whistler view." It's attractive, because it is old and simple looking; otherwise it seemed to me an ordinary London house, till a young giant of a Highlander in full kilts opened the neat green door and condescended to let me in at the gate. I never saw a Highlander before, except at a concert given by a "Scottish" Society, which for your life you dared not call Scotch. There a number of elderly maiden gentlemen I'd often met in the street, in tweeds and pot hats, sang and cavorted in little short plaid skirts, showing thin or fat legs, with conspicuous, pale knees. But this man's knees were baked a beautiful brown, and I could n't imagine it possible for him to wear any other costume, even in bed.

He led me into the house, and into a square hall, where a tall great-great-grandfather clock ticked slumberously, and the gray walls were almost hidden, down as far as their oak wainscoting, with portraits of Stuart kings and queens and princes. There were both the Charleses, copies of all the most famous pictures, and Queen Mary, girl and woman; every James that owned the name; Prince Rupert, and the Old and Young Pretender. I began to be glad that I'd taken Miss Timpson's advice, and taken off the smart lace dress, and the big hat dripping flowers; and I was still gladder by the time I got into the drawing-room — all the more because it was the loveliest room I ever saw in my life.

None of the furniture could have been newer than Stuart days. It all seemed of that period, if I can judge, and I think I can a little, because my cleverest friend is a house-decorator, who loves talking of her work and explaining it. There was a mellow, yet

radiant effect, of much ancient tapestry, of exquisite faded tints; old embroideries, dim gold, and purple and crimson; old portraits of beautiful, coquettish ladies in sheen of silk or satin, and of handsome bold-eyed men in armor or velvet. Chairs and sofas were covered with old brocade, of a rose tint as hard to find now as a dodo; or with quaint needlework, where threads of tarnished silver glittered out of autumn green. On the dark oak floor, with its wide polished boards, lay old Persian rugs, for which American millionaires would have given a great price. There were carved oak cabinets full, but not too full, of old Chelsea, and old Sèvres, standing out against a background of old French and Spanish fans. And on shelves and tables were many books, and bowls overflowing with roses. The room smelled of roses and mignonette; but there was an undertone of pot-pourri, as if in this room full of treasures from the past, the flowers of dead years were not to be forgotten.

"Miss Phayre!" announced the Highland youth, with a strong Scottish burr; but there was no one to receive the glad tidings.

"I thought her leddyship would be here," he mumbled, glaring reproachfully around; but at that moment, when I was wondering if Lady Meldon had forgotten having invited me, a woman's figure appeared in one of the long windows that opened on a garden.

She had a book in her hand, a red book, bright as a bunch of poppies against her black dress. I am sure I shall never forget the picture she made.

Oh, how thankful I was that I had come! I knew at once that I was going to love her, and that she could mean a great deal to me, if she were willing.

It sent quite a pang through my heart to think, what if Mrs. Lane had not given me the introduction, or if for any reason I'd made up my mind not to use it? Imagine being in the same London with This, yet missing it, and not even realizing what one had missed!

She is tall, and neither stout nor thin, but gracious in form and movement, with the noble graciousness of middle age which does not try to romp back to youth. She has thick, wavy chestnut hair, threaded all over with silver, like the brocade in her drawing-room; creamy skin, slightly faded, and with a sunny look over it, made — as you can see when you are quite close — by tiny pale gold freckles under her eyes. They — the freckles, I mean, not the eyes — were probably much brighter when she was young. The eyes could n't have been brighter; for they are the brightest and sweetest I ever saw in a woman's face, except my young mother's, which I see in memory-flashes. I think Lady Meldons eyes are brook-color. Perhaps the right name for them would be hazel; and they have both humor and sadness, which must mean knowledge of the world, and immense sympathy; and extraordinary mingling of sweetness and comprehending shrewdness. I wonder if that combination does n't mean great tact? For real tact can't exist except on a foundation of kindness as well as worldliness.

She was dressed with extreme simplicity; a black dress, and turned-over white collar of sheer muslin; on her wavy hair just enough of a widow's cap not to obtrude commemoration of grief upon others; yet a queen could not have seemed better dressed. I thought more highly than before of Mrs. Lane for appreciating such a woman, and felt it the finest compliment to

me, that I should have been sent to Lady Meldon. But I could n't at all understand why I had been sent, and I wondered.

I apologized for Aunt Dora and Marguerite, and then felt uncomfortably that it was very stupid to have apologized. But soon Lady Meldon made me comfortable again; and just as we had begun to talk about really interesting things in London, another Highland footman, almost exactly like the first, informed us that tea was in her "leddyship's Out."

He made this utterance so gravely that I almost laughed; and she did laugh. "My 'Out' 's at the bottom of the garden," she said. "I'm sure I don't need to explain to you what it means, though I might have to make it clear to some people; and maybe they would be shocked. But people who would be shocked, or must be explained to, don't hear of the existence of my Out. Only a very few know of its existence. I do think every woman ought to have an Out, don't you?"

As she talked, we went down the garden path together, and by and by came to a kind of little temple, almost hidden behind lilac and syringa bushes, in full flower. "Even my brother, whose house this is, is n't allowed in my Out, except as a special favor," Lady Meldon said. "He is called 'so quaint' and I think he really is quaint, but you would like him. But you would have to fumble about among the branches of your family tree, and find a Scottish twig or two, no matter how dry and small. After that, you could break it to him that you were an American. And if he took a fancy to you, he would present you with a white rose. He's a member of the White Rose Society, of course, and always puts on his letters an

English stamp upside down, half covered with one of the Rightful Stuart Queen."

I was glad she kept on telling me about these things, even after she had shown me into the Out; for in the little temple were quantities of silver-framed photographs, scattered wherever photographs could well be; mostly of soldiers; and of two, which had a table all to themselves (with a bowl of pansies and rosemary) one was a portrait of Sir Miles Culver. The other was of a much older man, in a uniform with a great many medals. I felt sure it must have been her husband's picture; and Sir Miles being with it, alone on the table of which the pansies and rosemary made a kind of shrine, it was certain that he was a great friend. As I looked, my heart beating hard with surprise and sudden excitement, I remembered in just what circumstances Mrs. Lane had begun to speak of Lady Meldon, and of introducing me to her. Now, something seemed quickly and sharply to explain all that had puzzled me. I knew instantly, quite well, why I had been sent to this sweet lady, to whom, in spite of her kindness, a little girl from San Francisco must seem irrelevant and extraneous.

I didn't say anything about the photograph of Sir Miles. But I felt that she must have seen me looking at it and turning red. For I knew I had turned red, so red that my ears tingled. Suddenly it struck me that probably Mrs. Lane had written to Lady Meldon, explaining me, and the letter of introduction I was bringing. It was almost as if I could see what Mrs. Lane said, in her large, sprawly handwriting: "this American girl is an adorer of Miles Culver's, though she's never seen him. He's been her childhood's hero, and if you want to enchant her,

you will manage to introduce the poor little thing to His High Mightiness. It might be rather fun to see her grovel in worship of the reality, after cherishing the ideal."

I shall never know, of course, what words were really written; but those came before my eyes like a vision — a disagreeable, humiliating vision. Instinct again, maybe! I was afraid Lady Meldon must be thinking me a silly, sentimental goose, and I did so want her to have a good opinion of me.

It is cosy and chintzy in the "out" den, not old like the house, but showing just as much taste and individuality. We had every imaginable kind of wafery sandwich and cake for tea; early strawberries, too; and I tried to eat and drink, and chat quite easily, as if that photograph were n't gazing straight into my face. I did my best to keep "eyes off," but it was a constant temptation to steal a peep; for this was a different photograph from any I had ever seen, and evidently taken since those I knew.

It was that of an older man, whom life had made even stronger than before, I thought; and I was wild to look at it long enough to see just where the change came in. But I would n't indulge myself until that odd little voice that speaks to me sometimes (maybe because I'm rather lonely) whispered in my ear: "If Mrs. Lane did write a separate letter about you and Sir Miles, it will only make you more conspicuous if you keep turning your eyes scrupulously away."

Then, just as I was hesitating whether or no it would be best to mention him, Lady Meldon said: "That is my husband's picture on that little table — the one I like best of him, except an old miniature, about which I'm somewhat sentimental. And the only

other man worthy to my mind of a place near him is Miles Culver."

I felt scarlet, but relieved that the name had been spoken.

I said Sir George must have been splendid looking, which was true; and then I added, no more stiffly than I could help, that the photograph of Sir Miles was different from any I knew. "We admire him very much in America, and have for years," I went on, generalizing in self-defense, in case Mrs. Lane had made me seem an idiot.

"I'm glad," Lady Meldon answered, simply. "He deserves to be admired by all the world, for he's done great things, and will do more, if the chance comes. He and my husband were both born soldiers — yet not hide-bound to soldiers' traditions and interests alone. I wonder if you know — but why should an American girl, and such a young one know — that my husband died in Miles Culver's arms at Ladysackett?"

I forgot all about my silly self-consciousness then. "Oh," I exclaimed, "I hardly realized that he was *that* Sir George Meldon! I was only a little girl then. But I used to sit breathless when one of the teachers in our school read to us about some of the brave and splendid things English officers did in the war. I remember that General Sir something Meldon — I'd stupidly forgotten it was George — commanded at Ladysackett till he — he — died; and then Sir Miles Culver had to take his place till the end of the siege."

"My husband was killed by the explosion of a shell," Lady Meldon said, quietly, but with a far-away, starry glistening of her hazel eyes. "Miles tried to save him — risked his own life in the attempt,

and was wounded. Then he knelt down where George had fallen, and supported him in his arms till the end, although it was a place of terrible danger — a place other men, though they were brave ones, fled from in a kind of mad horror. Do you wonder I keep Miles's picture beside my husband's, and his image in the next to the inner compartment of my heart?"

"No, I don't wonder," I said.

"I should like you to meet Miles," she went on, in a slightly changed and lighter tone, after we had both sat silent a moment. "As you and other Americans appreciate him, it would be a pleasure for you to see him, I think." And she said this so gracefully, classing me with others who "appreciated" the hero, her friend, that I was no longer ashamed; nor did I care whether or no Mrs. Lane had laughed at my childish hero-worship, in some private letter I was not allowed to see. I knew now that this dear woman would only like me the better for admiring him, and that she would understand, as no one else could.

"He comes to see me as often as he can," she continued, "when he is in London. And he is in London now — has been for two months. The powers that be have just offered him something very important, on the Mediterranean, but for some reason or other which he has n't chosen to explain to me, he has asked leave to think it over before deciding. Probably it may be on his brother's account. He has a brother about eleven or twelve years younger than himself — the handsomest boy in England, and — one of the most spoiled. Any one less like Miles you can't imagine — but their devotion to each other is quite beautiful. For my part, I think it the best thing about Laurie — no one ever calls him Lawrence. I've seen his love

for Miles acting on his natural selfishness and fiery impulses, like a brake. But I was saying, I should like you to meet Miles — to meet them both, for that matter. Only — ”

“ Oh, why should they meet *me?* ” I stammered. “ A great man like Sir Miles, and I — I ’m nobody! I don’t expect it. I don’t even — want it; because I should be frightened, and tongue-tied. I could n’t think of a word to say to him, if I had to speak. But — but I do like you to talk about him. It is interesting. If a cat may look at a king, it may purr when it hears stories of the king, although I know this king is said particularly to dislike cats.”

Lady Meldon laughed. “ You mean you ’ve heard that Sir Miles Culver does n’t like women? That ’s nonsense. No man with good red blood in his veins dislikes women; and Miles has plenty of red blood in his. He ’s a man, like other men — only stronger and finer than most, more fastidious perhaps, and with higher ideals of what women should be. You see, unfortunately, he has been a great deal run after by silly women, who wanted to flirt with the ‘ hero ’ if they were married, or ‘ grab ’ him for a husband, if they were n’t. And Miles is n’t the kind that can be grabbed. He ’s distinctly a man’s man; but I ’ve no doubt the right woman will loom over his horizon some day. Then he will love with all his might. He ’s only thirty-nine now, and in spite of the hardships and fighting, he does n’t look more than thirty. I was going to say, when I began with that ‘ only,’ and you very properly stopped me, merely this: Miles hates dinner-parties, and when he comes here, he rather expects, very foolishly but flatteringly, to find me alone, or with my brother.”

"Please don't think about me," I urged. "Truly, I'd rather not meet Sir Miles Culver." It seemed to say itself, yet as the words came out, I could n't be sure they were true. And they brought with them a feeling of flatness and vague disappointment, as if I were shutting a door which had stood open to warmth and light.

"Your leddyship," said one of the Highlanders at the door, "Colonel Sir Miles Culver is calling, and with him there's his brother and a strange leddy."

"How extraordinary!" exclaimed the dear woman, opening her beautiful eyes, with a bright, young look, as she turned impulsively to me. "There! what a chance for us both! — for me to introduce my old friend to my little new one. For you to see our hero, whose praises I've been singing. I think you must have been born under a lucky star, which makes such coincidences happen. I'm rather like that, too. And I've got in the habit of saying a thing is too strange, or too good, *not* to be true. Nigel, bring them all three here to the den."

If she could only have known how my heart was beating!

"Is it fair?" I asked. "Ought n't I to go away?"

"No, indeed," she reassured me, cordially. "He has n't come alone, so he does n't want *me* alone. He has his brother with him; and I fancy the 'strange lady' who is anonymous so far, may be an Irish cousin he has mentioned, come to town to be presented. Laurie was speaking of the girl, saying he supposed that Miles and he would have to be polite to her and her belongings — a Miss Brian, I believe."

"Colonel Sir Miles Culver, and Mr. Culver; Comtesse Hélène Garde."

There could be only one Helène Garde, just as there could be only one Miles Culver. I knew that. But the fact that I was about to see one of the most celebrated young women in Europe did n't greatly impress me at the moment; for my head throbbed, and before my eyes rained sparks, just as when the girls tossed me in a blanket because I chose a "Britisher for a hero."

Nigel announced them; and they came into the den, the two men following Helène Garde — the famous, the beautiful Helène Garde.

I sat perfectly still, my low chair drawn out of the way, close to the wall, and nobody noticed me at first, when the greetings were going on. I pressed my fingers tightly against my palms, and afterward I found that my nails had made several tiny holes in the thin suède of my gloves.

He was better than I had thought, greater than I had thought. I had only known him on paper, in black and white. Here he was alive, and tall and brown; a man, and very vital. I saw that his hair was dark, with a ripple in it, almost smoothed out. I saw deep-set blue eyes under straight black brows — true soldier eyes. You know the look there is in them that is in the eyes of no other men, no matter how brave or good, unless they too, like soldiers, have come to grips with death, and learned to feel no fear. It is a clear, noble look; and it was plain to see in Sir Miles Culver's eyes. But there was something else, too.

Perhaps if I had n't loved him all my life, as a child and a young girl may love an ideal, perhaps if I had n't thought of him and of no other man, perhaps if I had n't called to him, and talked to him in waking dreams, when I never expected to see him in any other

life but dreamlife, I should n't have been able to read that look. As it was, I did read it. I saw in his eyes that he had come to tell something dear as his own soul, to Lady Meldon, his best friend. Then, when he turned his face toward the great opera singer, Helène Garde, I saw that he loved her; and I knew that this was what he had come to tell. He had brought her to Lady Meldon — her, and his brother, the two beings dearest to him — and he was going to say that Helène Garde had promised to marry him.

He had n't seen me yet. I, sitting down, was almost hidden, as Lady Meldon moved forward to meet her guests. I could n't let Sir Miles tell his great news before a strange girl, not knowing that she was there. He would be vexed at finding he had done so, and it would be dreadful that I should be the cause of vexation to him — dreadful to me, in remembering it always, even though to him I might mean only a momentary annoyance, since my existence would never be much more to Sir Miles Culver than that of the chair I sat in.

But I could n't bear to sit still and let things happen. So I got up quickly, and he saw me. This was all that was necessary for me to do, for now he would say nothing which he did not wish a stranger to hear; and I would hurry away as soon as I could, politely, so as not to try his patience. For an instant, as I attracted his attention by rising suddenly, our eyes met. I had dreamed of their meeting — often, since I was a child; but the dream had always been very different from this, and better for me. There was no particular expression in the vivid compelling blue eyes; rather an effort to keep expression out. For if there had been any, it would have betrayed the fact that he was sorry

to find a strange girl, or any one at all, with Lady Meldon.

As I looked quickly away from his eyes, mine seemed to collide first with "Laurie" Culver's, then with Helène Garde's, the beautiful, famous woman who had won Sir Miles Culver. The eyes of neither showed interest in me, only a sudden narrowing, as if the brains behind them were saying, "What a bore that she should be here. Insignificant looking little thing, whoever she is. Hope she's going soon."

She was going soon. She felt foolishly miserable, and unwanted, and out of tune with life. For the first time in her memory she was sickeningly envious of another woman. Poor, poor, silly little Sandra Phayre, I'm sorry for you! Book, *you* are sorry, too, are n't you, mean as it is to be jealous? You are her only friend.

Just before, I had been feeling as if Lady Meldon were my friend, a very kind, warm friend. But now I realized that I was nothing to her, and that these three were a great deal; one of them dearer than most others left in the world. And I saw them as the three most interesting figures in any world: Sir Miles, eager, passionately in love, splendid as any man of the century; his brother, far handsomer, just as vital, yet not so strong; blue-eyed and dark-haired, like his elder brother, but olive-pale, not bronze, and with features perfect as those of a statue; full-lipped; and haughty as pictures of Lord Byron in his youth; Helène Garde, an aristocrat by birth, a beauty, a genius, newly sprung to fame in Europe, and clamored for in America at any price; with a face and some mysterious air of bewitchment, a lure of womanhood, such as I think Greek Helen must have had. I said

to myself: "Marguerite is almost as beautiful as she in feature and coloring; yet I believe Miss Garde could take any man she chose to take away from Marguerite, or from all other women I've ever known."

I suppose that quality of fascination is indescribable, and has been, since Eve. We hear of it in women, and it interests and thrills us by its mystery, its allurements that apparently nothing can withstand, even if to yield means ruin and loss of honor or life. I had heard and read of it often; fancied, too, that I could understand it a little in some girl or woman of whom people said, "Men go down before her. They can't resist her." But I never actually *felt* it before. Now, I felt it — this unspeakable attraction — rush to me like a rich perfume. And if even I, a girl, a jealous girl, could feel it, what must it be for men; for a man like Sir Miles Culver, who never wasted thoughts on other, ordinary women.

Lady Meldon had said, only a few minutes ago, that when he loved, he would love with all his might, for good or for evil. Now, his hour had come; and here was the woman; this tall, thin, supple Helène Garde, with her colorless face, shaped like a heart, her long eyes with the shadows of night in them, her cloud of dark hair that fell low over her ears, like a bird's dusky wings, her delicate nostrils that quivered as she breathed, her red lips that asked for kisses. I looked at her mouth, and her long, full throat, growing up like the stem of a flower, out of dark blue which ought not to have become her, but did become her strikingly well. And I thought, "If I were a man, I might love her or not, I don't know. But I should *want* her. And I should take her, if I could."

I said to Lady Meldon that I must go; and as I said it, I looked straight up into her eyes, so that she saw I did n't want to stay. And whether or no she understood, and guessed why he had brought Helène Garde to her, I can't say. But she did n't urge me to stop, or even introduce me to Sir Miles and the others; for that would have been awkward and useless, as I was just going; and there stood the Highlander who had announced the newcomers, ready to show me to the front door.

Lady Meldon bade me good-bye, and pressed my hand very, very kindly. She asked me to come again, and said she would call on me; and I thanked her, though I hardly heard her words at the time.

Nigel called me another taxi. I was whirled back to the hotel. Now, it is night; and before dinner a note came to me from the dear woman, in a firm charming handwriting, just like her, somehow. She said she felt sure that after the conversation we had had, I would be interested to know of Sir Miles Culver's engagement to Comtesse Helène Garde, daughter of the Ambassador in America, the young prima-donna who had been making such an astonishing success in London this season. The news would be in the *Morning Post* to-morrow; but she — Lady Meldon — had been the first one told. And now I was the second. Since we both admired Miles, we must both hope that this might be for his happiness. Helène Garde could not be too good for him. But she was undeniably fascinating. His sudden infatuation was easy to understand. "And when Miles wants a thing, he loses no time in making up his mind to get it," she added.

I shall let Aunt Dora and Marguerite see the news

in the *Morning Post* to-morrow. They have already taken to reading this paper every day, as it tells about the people they know, or want to know.

I have left my curtains drawn back from the big window which looks over the river, and I'm writing by the light of one electric lamp only, so as to see the moon shining on the dark water. Though it is May, almost summer, it seems deadly cold and sad out there, as sad as it is beautiful. I feel desperately homesick, though I hardly know what I am homesick for — unless for my lost childhood.

May 15th.

The engagement was announced in the *Morning Post*, as Lady Meldon said it would be, and Marguerite chanced on the notice while we were all three having breakfast together in our sitting-room at the Savoy.

I was watching her, as she read, knowing what she would probably find, and suddenly I saw her eyes light up as if she were pleased about something. Then I knew, even before she opened her lips, what she was going to say; and rather queerly, my thoughts jumped back to our childhood, when Marguerite used to be glad if I were punished, or if some toy which I loved above all others, were broken. I could never quite understand this pleasure of hers in any misfortune or disappointment of mine, yet I could n't help realizing it. And that is why, as her eyes sparkled over the newspaper, I knew exactly what she would say, almost to the very words.

"Oh, Sandy, no hope for you!" she chuckled. "You've come on the scene just too late. Your hero's engaged to a great celebrity." Then she went

on to read the announcement. "A marriage is arranged, and will take place late in July, between Colonel Sir Miles Culver, Bart. V.C. and Comtesse Hélène Garde, daughter of Comte Garde, Austrian Ambassador to America, and the late Lady Mary Garde."

Aunt Dora and Marguerite were staring at me, to see how I took the blow. As usual, when I would give anything to be icily regular, splendidly null, I was blushing; but I calmly helped myself to honey, and chose a thin triangle of toast with deliberation.

"I knew all that yesterday," I said. "I met Sir Miles and his gorgeous fiancée at Lady Meldon's."

"What, you met your hero and never said a word!" exclaimed Marguerite. "You sly little wretch."

"Not at all," I replied nonchalantly. "Neither of you gave me a chance. You were both out when I got home; and then the Jewetts came to dinner and —"

"You could easily have found a chance if you had wished to," said Aunt Dora. "I often think you are growing secretive, like your father. Why did n't you mention to me that this Lady Meldon was a friend of Sir Miles Culver? You very carefully gave us no idea that she was a person in an interesting circle of society."

"I did n't know anything about her myself until I saw her in her own house," I exclaimed. "It was only a kind of instinct that made me feel she would be interesting — and she is, very, quite apart from her friends."

"Now I see why Mrs. Lane gave you that letter of introduction," remarked Marguerite, shrewdly. "She thought you'd meet your ideal. Ah, I *know*

you're dying to change the subject, but you shan't! I won't give you a minute's peace till you've told me all about *him* — and *her*."

"Who — Lady Meldon?" I wanted to know.

"Don't be exasperating. Helène Garde, of course."

I described Helène Garde. Then I said dryly that Sir Miles was exactly like his photographs. No; I had not been introduced. No; we had not said a word to each other. No; I hardly thought he had looked at me. I was pretty sure that he would not know me again.

"Is Lady Meldon coming to call on us?" Aunt Dora asked. "I suppose you deigned to mention our existence."

I had to confess that I scarcely knew what I had said. Lady Meldon and I had not been long together when Sir Miles and his brother and Helène Garde had arrived.

"Oh, a brother!" Marguerite caught me up. "What is he like? Is he older or younger?"

"Younger, and like pictures of Lord Byron."

"That sounds as if he were handsome."

"He is, very."

"Then there's still hope for you to get into the family."

I didn't think it worth while to answer this; but luckily for me both Aunt Dora and Marguerite were far more interested in other things concerning the Culvers, than in my vague matrimonial prospects. Now that they knew what sort of friends Lady Meldon had, they yearned to meet her, despite the fact that she was only a Knight's widow, and lived in Chelsea. They discussed means of inducing her to call; and then Marguerite found a paragraph in the *Morn-*

ing Post, telling all about Helène Garde and her antecedents.

It was only a year ago that she had made her début as a professional singer, and she had not come as far west as San Francisco, so we had never seen or heard her. We had read a great deal in the papers about her wonderful success, her fascination, and her beauty. We knew vaguely that she was the daughter of an Austrian diplomat, and that, according to the custom of his country, she became a Comtesse because her father was a Comte. But because we had no personal interest in the singer who had made so great a sensation in New York and London, we had forgotten most of the intimate details printed some months ago in the American papers. Now Marguerite read that "Comte Garde, when in London as a young attaché at the Austrian Embassy, had married Lady Mary Worth, a daughter of the Earl of Avalon. The marriage had been disapproved by Lady Mary's family, but before her death there had been a reconciliation; and on coming to London to fulfil an engagement at Covent Garden, Comtesse Helène Garde had been asked to stay with her English grandparents Lord and Lady Avalon. It was at their house she had first, and quite lately, met Sir Miles Culver, whose family had always been on terms of friendship with the Avalons.

"It sounds like a real romance," said Marguerite. "Two great celebrities meet and fall in love, probably at first sight. He, the soldier hero of England; she a beauty with a title in her own right, and a voice that's a fortune. I'm afraid, Sandy, you would n't have had much chance even if you'd met your ideal a year ago. The fair Helène would have come sailing along and snapped him out of your mouth."

I laughed; and was thankful when I had contrived to switch her off to the subject of Lady Meldon. In my heart, I hardly expected that dear and sweet lady to have much time for me, still less for my relations whom she had not seen. But that same afternoon while we were at Sandown with the Jewetts, Lady Meldon's cards were left for all three of us, and an invitation for me to lunch with her to-day.

Fortunately Aunt Dora and Marguerite were already engaged; otherwise they might not have been very happy to let me go alone to a house where they now pined to visit; but as it was, they consoled themselves, and Aunt Dora means to return Lady Meldon's call to-morrow.

I longed to go to that luncheon, and yet I wished not to go. I wrote three notes, one accepting, one refusing, and then a third accepting. I felt it was for a special reason that Lady Meldon asked me again so soon. I thought she wanted me to understand that she really liked me a little, and that the warm new interests in her life were not to shut me out. I was very grateful, and because I would not let her think me otherwise, I wrote the third note. I hoped and believed that I could trust her tact, not to talk continually of Sir Miles Culver's engagement; and somehow I wasn't ashamed that Lady Meldon had read my heart. Only, I was not quite equal to seeing in her kind eyes a gentle pity for the silly girl who had met her hero, and lost him, all on the same day.

It did not occur to me that Sir Miles and Comtesse Hélène might be coming to luncheon. Lady Meldon's note said only, "I want you to meet my brother. And there may be three or four other friends — I am

not sure of them yet. But I should like to be sure of you." When I arrived, however, and was shown into the drawing-room, there were Sir Miles and "Laurie" Culver, and a strange-looking elderly man whom I guessed to be the brother who was "so quaint." As I entered Lady Meldon and Helène came in through a long window from the garden.

The dear woman introduced us, saying that Comtesse Helène and I doubtless had American friends in common. I was thrown a fascinating smile and a word or two which meant nothing, not even the most superficial interest, merely the habit of charm. Then the singer turned to Laurie Culver, and showed him a white rose which she had brought in from the garden. "That is the favorite flower of the house," she said, in her wonderfully modulated voice; "and it is mine, too. Do you know what it means? Silence."

"Is it for me?" asked Laurence Culver, not putting out his hand to take the rose, and not even looking at it, but at Helène. His blue eyes blazed. I thought I had never seen eyes so brilliant. I suppose all men look at Helène Garde like that.

"Yes," she said, smiling at him. "It is for you." Then he took the white rose, and his pale olive face blushed red — I would not be sure whether from pleasure or shyness. Yet he did not seem delighted; and though he is quite young, he has not the air of a shy youth easily embarrassed. There was something sullen and almost somber about him at that moment, I felt, though perhaps I imagined it, as I am always imagining odd things about people who interest me.

Laurence Culver already had a flower in his button-hole, a curious deep red orchid, as strange and exotic

looking as *Helène Garde* herself; but he tore it out, and tossed it, broken, on to a table near by. Then he replaced it with the white rose *Helène* had given him.

I saw this little scene while I was being made acquainted with Mr. Graeme, Lady Meldon's brother, and Sir Miles Culver. By the time it was Laurie's turn to have to meet me, he had slipped the white rose safely into his buttonhole. Sir Miles smiled very pleasantly, as if he were being introduced to a good child, but Laurie looked through, rather than at me, just as both had done the other day.

Evidently Lady Meldon had talked of me to her brother, Mr. Graeme, for he conscientiously laid himself out to be agreeable, beginning a conversation by asking me if I "had Scottish blood in my veins." He quite warmed when I said my mother's mother had been — I almost blurted out the fatal word "*Scotch*," but changed it hastily into "*Scottish*." Mr. Graeme is partly bald, with one of those dome-like foreheads which begin at the eyebrows and go on without interruption to the back of the head. Far down on his baldness a thick band of longish, scarlet hair is clamped on, like a red veil cut off square at the ends. His pale blue eyes see visions over the top of your hat, on the wall somewhere, as if he were the seventh son of a seventh son, with the gift of second sight. At luncheon I sat on his left hand, and he drew my attention to the white roses which decorated the table. "We never have anything else when white roses can be got, in season or out," he said. And I saw *Helène Garde* and Laurie Culver glance at each other quickly, then glance away.

On his right hand, *Helène Garde* sat, and on Lady Meldon's right, Sir Miles, which brought him next to

me; but it was a round table, quite small, only large enough for the masses of white roses on the lace table-cover not to be in anybody's way; so we could all talk across easily, without raising our voices. I did not say much, except to answer the questions which Sir Miles, out of politeness, asked me about California; but the conversation was general and very interesting. I liked far better to listen than to talk. As I watched *Helène Garde*, I understood more and more clearly why Sir Miles Culver had fallen in love with her. It seemed to me that if she wished to make a man care, even a strong, self-controlled man like him, it would be impossible to resist. I wondered only that all the men she knew were not in love. There is something about this woman which reminds me of tropical fruit, rich and luscious and perfumed.

"If you had been the forbidden apple in Paradise," I said to myself about her, "and if I'd been Adam, I should have grabbed you away from Eve the minute the serpent pointed you out, and gobbled you up; I know I should."

I learned during the meal that Sir Miles and *Helène Garde* had dined with Lady Meldon and Mr. Graeme the night after their engagement was announced; so to-day's luncheon was not an entertainment in honor of the great event. I might have known this, for I would not have been invited to a special, intimate feast. I guessed that I had been asked so that I might have the pleasure of meeting Sir Miles, my first glimpse of him having been an aggravation.

When we had come to the hot-house strawberries and cream, there began in the garden the most extraordinary sound I had ever heard — a kind of wild wailing, like the lament of a lost soul — a savage,

passionate soul who had died in battle, with a great love unsatisfied. It was not music, and yet it was music. I gave a little start — I could n't help it — and a weird creepiness ran up and down my spine. Sir Miles and Mr. Graeme were both looking at me.

"What do you think of that?" Sir Miles asked, smiling.

"I don't think, I just feel," was the only answer I could give. "I don't know what it is, or whether I ought to like or hate it, but — somehow, it's as if I'd heard the same sound in another existence, and the thrill of it has got into my blood, to stay forever. I know I could fight bravely to that strange music — if it is music. As long as it went on, I could n't be afraid, I would n't mind dying to it!"

"Good lassie! Grand lassie! That's the true spirit. It's the true instinct in you waked by the pipes," exclaimed Mr. Graeme, his face flushing all the way up to the round top of the dome. "Why, it's my Hieland lads skirling the bagpipes in the garden, dinna ye ken?"

He has not even a Scottish accent really, and speaks like any Englishman, but he can bring out the real "burr" splendidly when he chooses. What with the wild music, and the compliments Lady Meldon's brother was paying me, I was quite excited; but glancing at Helène Garde, I saw that she was trying to hide a laugh. Mr. Graeme, whose rolling blue eyes are very quick, in spite of his way of looking past one at the wall, saw too, and caught her up abruptly. "I suppose to a trained singer like you, Comtesse, the pipes have n't much sweetness in them?" he said.

She smiled her enchantress smile, and answered that she supposed the love of the bagpipes was an

acquired taste; and no doubt she could acquire it in time.

After luncheon, Lady Meldon whispered to me, "You have won my brother forever — fastened his friendship to you with hooks of steel. As for poor Comtesse Helène, she has finished herself with him. He will always be wondering after this what Miles finds to like in her, except her voice."

Except her voice! As if that alone were not enough, even if she had not had those eyes, and that smile, and that lovely walk, like a tall young tree swayed by the wind!

She sang when the men came back to the drawing-room, Laurie accompanying her on the piano. I shut my eyes to listen, partly because to hear her was like dreaming a golden dream, partly because the look in Sir Miles Culver's eyes, fixed on the woman he loved, made me feel that I spied behind a veil a wonderful revelation which I had no right to see.

May 30th, Midnight.

I was beginning to write, "Something has happened." But just as I would have written down the first word, a question asked itself in my mind. *What* has happened that can be put into words? Nothing, really. Nothing at all has happened, except — and I may have been mistaken.

But no. It is childish to try and deceive myself in that way. I was not mistaken. Yet if not, is it possible that what I saw meant nothing wrong, no deceit, no treachery?

The thing has left a terrible impression upon my mind. I don't know what to do. But I will write it all out, tell it to my Book, and when I read what I

have set down, it will be like taking the calm advice of a friend, and I may see more clearly.

To-night *Helène Garde* was to have sung *Carmen* for the first time in England. Lady Meldon had a box lent by a friend who was going abroad. She had promised to dine with us at the Savoy, before receiving the box. When it came, she telephoned, asking us all three to go to hear *Carmen* with her. She said that she had invited Sir Miles and his brother, but they preferred the stalls they had already bought, as being less conspicuous. Mr. Graeme was in Scotland for a few days, Lady Meldon added, so there would be plenty of room in the box, and we could bring our friends if we liked. Aunt Dora at once invited the two Jewetts, Frank and George. She knows I don't like them much; but then — the box was n't mine!

The arrangement stood like this, until yesterday — and we were to have dinner early, the Jewetts dining with us, rather to my disgust, for I was sure Lady Meldon would n't care for them. I was afraid the evening would be half spoiled for her, and I was not quite as sorry as I might have been, when word came that she was down with a bad cold. The box remained ours; and as there was one extra place, Aunt Dora told the Jewetts to bring an English friend of theirs, about whom they are always talking, Lord Burne. From the anecdotes I'd heard them tell of him, I thought he must be a perfectly horrid person, just their sort, and not at all Lady Meldon's sort, so it hardly seemed fair to plant him in a box lent by her. I said this to Aunt Dora, and she was angry.

"If you consider yourself too good to associate with an English earl and two of the smartest and richest

young men in New York, you 'd better stay at home," she remarked, acidly.

I did think that tirade sounded dreadfully "middle class," as they say over here; and because it was on the tip of my tongue to tell Aunt Dora so, I made no answer at all. Then Marguerite said that I was priggish, which made me cross, for whatever I may be, I'm *not* a prig! Anyhow, it ended in my deciding — or Aunt Dora deciding — that I should n't go to the opera with them. This morning when I called to ask how Lady Meldon was, she was well enough to see me, though not well enough to leave the house. It came out in conversation that I was not to be of the party at Covent Garden, and Lady Meldon asked me if I would like to dine quietly with an invalid, in her boudoir. Of course, I said yes. If I had gone to the opera I should not have known what I know now — what I would give a great deal not to know.

Lady Meldon's boudoir is a dear little den (almost as nice as the "Out") next door to her bedroom. I have been allowed in it twice now, which is a great compliment, because only her "real friends" (she says) are ever received there. Just as we were finishing dinner — she on a sofa, wearing a white tea-gown — a message came up that Sir Miles Culver had called, and was in the drawing-room. Would she see him a moment?

"How very odd!" she exclaimed to me, when the big boy in kilts had been sent to bring Sir Miles up. "Why is n't he at Covent Garden? Carmen must be tripping out of the cigarette factory just about this time."

I saw by Sir Miles' face, when he came in, that he was disappointed not to find Lady Meldon alone, and

I would gladly have been erased from the face of the earth if I could.

"Helène has been suddenly taken ill," he explained, "and her understudy is singing. Her maid telephoned, but I was out, and knew only an hour ago, though it seems they heard at Covent Garden before six, in time to save a panic. I went at once to Lord Avalon's house, though the message my man gave me said the illness was not serious — only a slight chill, affecting the throat. But Helène could n't receive me. She'd taken some soothing medicine, her maid said, and was to be kept quiet."

"Did you see either of her grandparents?" asked Lady Meldon.

"No. They were dressing for dinner. Geneviève, Helène's French maid, said they were not at all anxious, since seeing the doctor."

"That sounds encouraging!" exclaimed my sweet lady. "And as the poor old dears always go to bed at ten every night, and would n't have heard her anyway, they won't have the disappointment of missing Helène's Carmen. She told me they were not breaking their rule never to go out at night, even to hear her sing. It is amusing of them."

"They hear her sing at home," said Sir Miles. "She is charming to them. I've been allowed to be one of the select audience of three in that huge music room of theirs. I understood the feelings of Mad King Leopold."

He pretended not to be anxious; but I felt that he had come to Lady Meldon for consolation, and that he was cheated of half the pleasure of his call by my presence. However, I could not go, as such a move would have been too obvious; and Sir Miles

did not stop long after he had drunk a cup of black coffee, and smoked a cigarette which Lady Meldon insisted on his taking. He must go, he said, for, having an unexpectedly free evening, he had promised to write some letters of introduction for Laurie, who had suddenly decided to run over to America.

"He's thinking of the Rockies, and wants to know two friends of mine who have ranches in Southern California, very good fellows," Sir Miles explained.

Lady Meldon looked surprised. "Why, that is indeed a sudden resolution!" she exclaimed. "I did n't know Laurie took much interest in America, although your mother was a Virginian, was n't she?"

Sir Miles smiled. "I think Helène has succeeded in awakening his interest," he said. "She's not an American, of course, but she has lived in America most of her life and loves the country as if it were her native land."

It was not ten o'clock when Sir Miles left, and Lady Meldon kept me till nearly eleven, knowing that Aunt Dora and Marguerite would not be back till late.

No longer do I fly about in taxis, for by Aunt Dora's advice and wish, I have engaged two automobiles for the season; one an electric limousine thing, nice for shopping and theaters; the other, a touring car, in which we can run out of town. I lent her the limousine for the opera to-night, of course, and kept the other for myself.

When I started away, it was just at the quiet time before people leave their dinner-parties and before theaters close. There were few automobiles or carriages, but the moonlight was so clear and lovely that it was a pleasure to be out of doors, and I told the



"SHE WAS IN HIS ARMS, HER HEAD ON HIS SHOULDER"—Page 53

chauffeur to drive slowly. There is no electric bell in this touring car, so I had to lean out to speak to him; and just as I was drawing in my head, a car passed close to mine, going the other way. It was a limousine, but both windows were open, and at that instant a light from some street lamp shone full into it. I saw Laurie Culver with Helène Garde. She was in his arms, her head on his shoulder, and he was kissing her.

The more I think of it, the more certain I am that I could n't have been mistaken. The car was so near, I could have leaned out a little further and put my hand into the window. It *was* Helène Garde. It *was* Laurie Culver. She had on a black dress. Her neck was bare and very white. Over her head was a black scarf which looked like Spanish lace. Laurie Culver's head was uncovered, and he was in evening clothes.

Could there be any possible explanation, I wonder, which would make it right for them to kiss each other like that, without treachery to Sir Miles? Oh, I wish, I wish I could think of some such explanation! I can't bear to believe that his only brother and the woman he worships could betray his trust. The thought that they may be deceiving him — deceiving such a man as he, too noble to suspect those he loves — makes me feel actually sick.

I wish I could be certain that neither of them saw me. But it seems very unlikely they should have recognized any one, when they were so intent upon each other, that apparently they had forgotten the whole world outside their motor-car. I should hate to think Helène knew I had seen, and that she might be afraid I would tell *him*.

He was always my ideal. Now, he is more than

that, just as a living man is worth more than a marble statue of himself. I love him — there is no use in trying to hide that from my Book, to whom I tell everything, and who would know — knowing me — even if I did n't tell. But just because I love him so much, I want him to be happy. I would — I am sure I would — give my right hand and my whole arm with it to be cut off, or even burned, if I could save him from a sorrow, a cruel humiliation, perhaps, which I fear may be hanging over him.

What if I should tell Lady Meldon that I saw Laurie Culver kissing Helène Garde in a motor-car, when she was supposed to be ill in bed, and Laurie had asked his brother to spend the evening writing letters of introduction? Perhaps she would speak to Laurie and still be able to save Helène for Sir Miles. If any one could help, Lady Meldon would be the one. I shall dream of the white rose Helène gave Laurie — the rose that meant *silence*.

May 31st, Morning.

I have read this all over, calmly — or at least more calmly than I wrote, and I see that I can *do nothing*. It would be horrible to tell Lady Meldon, for it would only make her unhappy, and saddle her with a responsibility which I should be shuffling off my shoulders, selfishly on to hers. I see that she could not speak to Laurie Culver, or Helène Garde — still less to Sir Miles. It would do harm to speak, rather than good. If *those two* care for each other desperately enough to betray Sir Miles, they would listen to no advice, no arguments; and little as I know Sir Miles, I am sure he would refuse to believe anything against them.

Yet, how dreadful to let things go on — if anything is going on — which may break his heart in the end! I can do no more than hope and pray that, at worst, they were saying good-bye to their love last night, and that after all they mean to be true.

June 5th.

Every morning I have been half expecting and dreading to see an announcement in the *Post* saying that the "marriage arranged between Sir Miles Culver and Comtesse Helène Garde will not take place." But there has been no such announcement; and yesterday I heard from Lady Meldon that Sir Miles had persuaded Helène to be married July 6th — a month from to-morrow. It seems that the 6th of July is his birthday; and he always thought, if he should ever marry, he would like it to be on that day. She will have finished her engagement at Covent Garden by July 1st. She is singing again now. I read that she was well enough to appear as Carmen on the 2nd of June. She was a great success. The papers, and all the people I have seen who heard her, say that she is the most perfect Carmen of the generation.

Jack Jewett has proposed to Marguerite, but she has asked for three months to make up her mind — or rather, Aunt Dora has insisted that Marguerite is n't to be bound for three months. I thought this an odd stipulation, for they both seemed quite infatuated with the Jewetts, especially Jack; but Marguerite says she wants to "look about and see what there is in England first." That does n't sound much like being in love! Aunt Dora considers Marguerite "too young to be engaged definitely just yet." Yet she's older

than I am, and Aunt Dora is always reminding me that I'm "of age now, and ought to know my own mind in everything." Talking of proposals, Lord Burne has proposed to me; but I'm perfectly certain if he's in love, it's not with Sandy Phayre. How *horrid*, being an heiress!

I have met Sir Miles twice at Lady Meldon's since I wrote. He came there alone, without Helène, who is supposed to be "saving herself up" now for her work, and going nowhere by day. He is very kind and pleasant to me, though still treating me quite like a child, to whose level he must come down in talking, and to whom he does n't at all know what to say. How thankful I am that Lady Meldon is the sweet, loyal woman she is! I know she would never even hint to Sir Miles about my foolishness though I *feel* that she has guessed it. And who knows what Mrs. Lane wrote her about me and my "ideal"?

Aunt Dora and Marguerite are being very gay. Lord Burne has made them acquainted with a good many people; and getting to know some members of a certain set has a snowball effect. They are accumulating more and more friends every day. I could have these new acquaintances too, but they are the sort who make me feel homely, and old-fashioned, and "out of things." Bridge bores me so desperately that even to talk of it makes me feel quite sleepy and dull, as if I had anæmia of the brain; and all Lord Burne's samples adore bridge. They are very interested in races, too, and I don't know enough about the "turf" to understand. I love horses, but I have never thought of them from the racing point of view. Luckily, no one minds if I make my own engagements. I have done a lot of sight-seeing, alone with Miss Timpson,

and best of all I love Westminster Abbey. I go there often by myself and sit for an hour or two in the afternoon.

June 15th.

Dead! I say the words over and over to make them seem real, yet I can't believe in them. She, so vivid, so full of life and magnetism, and with such a voice of gold! It is wicked of me, perhaps, but I can't help feeling it the worst of all, that a voice like hers should be gone from the world forever.

Almost, I could wish for his own sake that Laurie Culver had been killed too, rather than maimed for life, as they say. Why wasn't it he, instead of the chauffeur? I'm sure he must be asking himself that question now, in bitterness beyond expressing. They fear his back is broken.

And yet, for Sir Miles' sake, it may be well that the poor chauffeur is silent forever. How hard-hearted and dreadful those words look! But I don't mean them to be so. I can't help thinking of Sir Miles, and feeling thankful he may never learn the truth. That is the one consolation in the awful disaster. He is saved from knowing how the two he loved best in all the world meant to deceive him.

If the chauffeur had lived, and Laurie Culver had been killed with Helène Garde, the man might have told where the car was going. I believe that Laurie will spare his brother the added grief of knowing what betrayal had been planned. And if there were others in the secret — Helène's maid, for instance — I pray that she may have sense and kindness enough to keep the secret.

Of course, I do not *know for certain* that Helène and Laurie were running away together. But putting what I saw the other night together with the fact that the accident happened close to Dover, an hour before the boat was due to leave for Calais, I guess what secret plans they may have been trying to carry out. Perhaps, when Helène Garde pretended illness and let her understudy sing while she drove with Laurie Culver alone, the two resolved to part, for honor's sake, but found afterward that they were not strong enough for the sacrifice. Oh, I *hope* they meant to part, for in the remorse Laurie must be suffering now, even that memory would be one drop of balm. It would be something if he could say to himself: "We would have done what was right if love had n't bound us fatally together."

I have often thought that I could forgive any sin committed for a great love's sake, and this love of Helène Garde's and Laurie Culver's must have been great. Lady Meldon said to me one day that Helène Garde was immensely ambitious, yet it seems she was ready to throw over ambition for love. Sir Miles would be considered a "good match," even for her — for any woman, under Royalty; and even a princess might gladly give up all else to be his wife. Helène Garde, admired as she was by thousands, would have lost a great deal in jilting Sir Miles Culver for Laurie. People would have turned against her for betraying their hero. She must have known this, yet in the end, not have counted the cost. And Laurie — if he has a soul, he must have hated to cheat his brother.

Yes, I can't deny that theirs was a great love. And perhaps, if I read the story of it in a book, or if it concerned people I knew nothing of, I might have

said it should be forgiven. But I *can't* forgive those two for betraying Sir Miles.

The dreadful tidings were in the morning papers; and soon after we read, Lady Meldon telephoned to say she was starting for Dover.

"Miles sent me his man with the telegram that gave him the news," she said. "He himself left at once by motor, as there was no train, and it was quicker than arranging for a special. Now I am going to give him such small help and comfort as I can. He has many friends, but I believe that you and I are the ones who will grieve most for him in his terrible sorrow."

It did not startle or shame me that she should take my love for Sir Miles so for granted. It was a proof of her belief in its unselfishness that she should class it with hers for him.

She talked through the telephone while waiting for the taxi that was to spin her and Mr. Graeme quickly to the railway-station, and without my asking a question, she told me the story of the accident, so far as she knew it.

"I heard from Miles yesterday," she said, "that Helène was going for a week to St. Margaret's, near Dover — ordered there by her throat specialist, to be braced up after her season at Covent Garden. It seems she had never felt well since that chill, the first night when she was to have sung Carmen. I think the St. Margaret's plan was a surprise to Miles. Helène forbade him to come and see her during the rest-cure — doctor's orders, again — but Laurie was already in the neighborhood, staying with friends who are mad about golf. I don't know yet how he happened to be with her in the motor-car. Very likely she met

him on the road, and picked him up. But I am sure to hear, when I get to Dover, as Miles has wired from there the first thing this morning to say that Laurie is conscious and has explained everything."

Before noon, the evening papers had the latest news. Laurie's spine is supposed to be seriously injured, and a great specialist, Sir Frederick Trevor, is going to Dover to-day to look at him. Poor Laurie's explanation was in all the papers too. I suppose he was anxious for Helène's sake and Sir Miles', to prevent hateful gossip.

He had told his brother how Helène's car passed him, near the golf-course, as he was walking back alone to his friend's house, and Helène invited him to get in. Then, a few minutes after, a tire burst, and it was in trying to make up for the delay, by going too quickly, that the accident happened — or rather, that it ended so fatally. I never heard before that the steel of a steering-rod could "crystallize," and snap in two; but it seems that it is a well-known thing, especially with a very high-powered car. But if they had not been going so fast when the steering-rod snapped off in the chauffeur's hands, perhaps nobody need have been killed, or horribly injured.

After lunch the two Jewetts came in with Lord Burne and could talk of nothing but the tragedy. Apparently they had no doubt of Laurie's explanations being true. If there were the least breath of scandal, they are the kind who would know and repeat it.

Late this afternoon I had a long telegram from Lady Meldon. She says Helène's face is not marred, and that she looks "unearthly beautiful." The specialist had not yet arrived to see Laurie when the wire was sent off. The last words of the telegram were: "I

pray that Miles' brain may not be turned by overwhelming grief."

I too, have prayed, and will pray. God help him! There is no suffering I would not accept joyously, if I could buy his peace with my own pain.

June 22nd.

To-day I have been thinking that this is a terrible world. Perhaps such a thought is sinful, but it seems so cruelly unjust that I should have more money than I know what to do with, and that a world's hero like Sir Miles Culver should be poor.

I have seen Lady Meldon for the first time since she went off suddenly to Dover with Mr. Graeme. They both stayed there with the brothers till yesterday. Then Laurie was brought back to London; and to-day was Helène Garde's funeral. Her father arrived from America. Poor girl, her mother died long ago.

They have laid Helène's beautiful body in Brookwood; and when Lady Meldon sent for me she had just returned from there. She is thin and very pale. There is more gray in her thick auburn hair. She looks as if she had had an illness; yet when we talked together, she had no thought for herself. She could think and speak only of Sir Miles.

"I don't see how he is to bear his life," she said, with tears in eyes and voice. "If he had not to live for Laurie, I believe that in the agony of losing Helène, he would have killed himself. Yet I don't know! Miles has a strong soul."

"He would never have done anything cowardly," I ventured. "I can't help feeling that he is the sort of

man who would think it cowardly to take his own life."

"Ah, *think!*" echoed Lady Meldon. "He is not in a state to think. He has not been, since the accident. If you could see Miles now, you would hardly recognize him."

"Is he so changed?" I asked. I tried not to let my voice quiver.

Lady Meldon stopped for a few seconds, as if she were making up her mind what to answer. "Terribly, terribly changed," she said at last, almost in a whisper. "It is n't so much a physical change — that's the worst of it. He's thinner — naturally, since he's scarcely eaten or slept for eight days. But he never had any superfluous flesh, so it is n't that which makes the difference. He had n't a line of gray visible in his hair. Now it looks as if it had been powdered at the temples. The brown has faded from his face, and left it almost white. But all that — is *nothing*. The dreadful thing is that he looks as if his soul were gone, and another strange soul has come to live in his tortured body. When I meet his eyes, I don't recognize what looks out at me from them. Oh, my child, if he should go mad!"

"He won't — he can't," I faltered. "You said yourself that he has a strong soul."

"Yes, but remember what he has had to bear. It takes almost more than human strength. And Miles, though a noble fellow, has never been a particularly religious man. He has not got that comfort to help him. He worshiped Helène. He thought of her as an angel — a goddess of perfection and beauty. And poor Laurie! No brother ever loved another as Miles has loved him. All his life, since Laurie was old

enough to be sent to a public school, Miles has made sacrifices for the boy — great sacrifices, for he's very poor — for a man in his position — and he wanted Laurie to have every advantage, no matter what he gave up himself. To send a boy to Eton, and let him live there as rich boys live, costs money. Still more, at Oxford. I'm afraid Laurie was rather reckless and self-indulgent — the artistic temperament, you know! I've always imagined there were debts. The beautiful old place in Lancashire, which has been in the Culver family since the days of Henry VI, has n't been kept up for generations as it ought to be, and so — though it's been let for years — it does n't command a big rent. It's grown to be second nature with Miles to sacrifice himself for Laurie; but things were going better when he met Helène. The debts were nearly paid, I fancy; Miles thought himself well enough off to marry. Between him and Helène they might have managed to live at Culver Castle part of the year. Now, he must sell the place, and take what he can get for it — for Laurie's sake."

"Why — why?" I asked.

"Because he's got to have money — a great deal of money. Thousands of pounds. Laurie may live for years, but he will be a helpless wreck, unless a terrible operation is performed, and succeeds. There's just a chance of success; and the most famous men in England will operate. Think what it will cost!"

"They ought to do it for nothing!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, my dear! even if they would, of course, Miles would n't let them. He could n't accept charity. Why, they'd not *dare* offer, with a man as proud as Miles, to cut their fees down by a guinea. But all that expense he might meet, somehow. Only, suddenly

Laurie has been seized by a whim to go and stay at Culver Castle. He says, if he can be taken there before the operation, and live there afterward — in the place that was his home as a little boy — he believes that eventually he will get well. Think what a cruel situation for Miles! He *must* sell the castle, if Laurie is to have his chance of life; yet the doctors say they won't answer for him unless he is humored in everything. Is it strange, after losing his idolized Helène, that this other trouble, almost as horrible, has changed Miles' soul? It is agonizing to see him. He seems to live only by mechanism. He is like an automaton, except when he is with Laurie. Then he is more himself — gentle and tender, and strong. But if the strain should be too great even for his immense self-control?"

"Something must be done to save him," I said, desperately. "Oh, dear Lady Meldon, perhaps I have thought of a thing. What if I should buy Culver Castle, and then beg him to go on living in it with his brother? I should be happier than I've ever been, if I could do that."

For an instant Lady Meldon's face brightened. Then it clouded again. "That's like your generous, impulsive little heart," she said, "but it would n't do. I told you, Miles is very proud. But it did n't need telling. You've already seen enough of him to guess that, for yourself. Such an offer would seem to him like charity. He would ask 'why does this little American girl want to buy my place, if not to live in it?'"

"I — could say I was n't ready to live there yet, and he could have it till I wanted it for myself. I could even let to him, if that would help — for a very, very small rent."

"Culver Castle is n't a place that lets for a very small rent, although it needs repairing, inside and out. And keeping it up costs a lot — more than Miles can afford, if he has to pour out all the money he may get from the sale, on luxuries for his brother. No, dear, I'm afraid that plan would n't work. And besides, every one would be talking about it, if it could be arranged. They would say —"

"For myself I would n't care *what* they said!" I exclaimed, when Lady Meldon paused, looking suddenly embarrassed.

"Miles would care — because of his pride, if nothing else. Oh, my child, reflect! The idea is — is out of the question. Night and day I try to think of something to do, to save the situation, but the more I think, the less I see any good way. The only thing is to sell Culver Castle, and let Laurie get over his strange longing to live there, as best he can. At least, that's all that occurs to me now."

"Could n't I somehow buy the Castle without any one finding out my name as the buyer, and then give it to Sir Miles anonymously?" I persisted.

Lady Meldon shook her head. "No, no! I'm sure you would love to do such a quixotic thing. But Miles would n't accept the gift anonymously, even if the secret of the ownership could be kept from him. He would n't consent to live there."

"Not even to save his brother?"

"If the choice were put to him in that way, it might be the last straw to upset the balance. For the sake of his life and reason, I would not want it offered to him. Things are bad enough, but better as they are. Yet —"

"Yet — what?"

"Nothing, nothing worth mentioning," she put me off; though she looked at me so oddly when she broke her sentence short, that I could not resist the question. Suddenly, her thoughts had seemed to go far, far away, and a faint light glimmered in her eyes, a pale, moon-light reflection of hope.

"I ought not to have worried you with my worries," she went on. "You know already that I love Miles better than any one now left to me in the world, better than my brother — as much as if he were my own son. And you — though you admire and reverence him, and even love him as an ideal, in your child's way — can't realize what I feel. I ought not to distress you uselessly, just because you're so sympathetic that it does me good to talk to you."

"I do realize," I assured her. "And you are n't distressing me uselessly. Dear, kind friend, I am not ashamed to tell you that I, like you, would die to serve Sir Miles."

She looked at me very sweetly and sadly. "There are things harder to do for others than dying."

"I know," I said. "But there's nothing I would not do."

Again her eyes lit with that faint light, like a ray of hope. "Almost I believe you mean it, and would carry out your words, if you could," she answered.

"You'll remember, if there should come a time when I could do anything?" I implored.

"Yes, I will remember," she said, thoughtfully.

COWES, *August 8th.*

I have not written in my Book for nearly six weeks. It has not seemed as if there were anything worth

saying about myself, or my thoughts; and there's nothing now, really, except that we are leaving England to-morrow morning for Dinard. Marguerite and Aunt Dora are very anxious to go, because some of the new friends they have made will be there at the Casino Hotel.

Marguerite says we have "squeezed the season like an orange." I suppose we have. There's very little that Americans ought to do in English society that we have not done. I hated it all, thinking of *him* in his sorrow, with the world going on around him just as if Helène were still alive, Laurie well, and he happy, as he was two months ago. But Aunt Dora and Marguerite want to be "in things," and I don't wish to be selfish or conspicuous.

If we'd had invitations we should have gone to Scotland; but no one asked us, and the next best thing seems to be Dinard — according to Marguerite.

The operation has not yet been performed on Laurie Culver. He is not strong enough to bear it. Months may pass first. Lady Meldon says he is helpless, and has no sensation in his body below the waist. Sir Frederick Trevor thinks it just possible that an operation may give him the use of his legs, eventually, but there's only one chance in a hundred of complete success. Sir Miles had taken Laurie up to Lancashire, to Culver Castle for the present, but is trying hard to sell the place. Lady Meldon tells me he would let it go for thirty thousand pounds, though it's worth at least twice that.

According to her, he is always the same — like a body without a soul.

I don't know quite what we shall do, after Dinard.

ELYSEE PALACE HOTEL,
PARIS, October 7th.

I can hardly wait to see Lady Meldon. She has telegraphed that she will arrive this evening and come to our hotel, to "remind me of something I said, the last time we met." There is only *one thing* I can think of. Can it be that?

Midnight.

She came at seven, and I have been dining with her, alone in her private sitting-room. I have only just left her, and come to my own room. I shall put down everything exactly as it happened, so far as I can remember, even our precise words. Always I have been doing that since I began confiding in my Book.

Imagine Lady Meldon's being afraid to say anything to me! But that was the way she began. She would not tell why she had come, until after we had dined. All during dinner she talked of ordinary things, or, at least, what seemed ordinary compared to those that filled our hearts. When we had finished, she ordered café noir. "I don't drink coffee after dinner, you know. It keeps me awake," I said, before the waiter had gone. "And you used not to —"

"Ah, but I shall to-night!" she exclaimed. "And I want you to have some too. We shan't sleep, in any case, so it does n't matter; and you know soldiers can go into battle more bravely after taking strong coffee than alcohol."

As she spoke in an odd, meaning way, her eyes met mine and held them.

"You almost frighten me," I tried to laugh.

"Don't be frightened," she said. "That's why I

want you to have the coffee, and why I want it myself. You have no idea how frightened *I* am! I am sick with dread of you, my dear, good child."

I should have thought she was joking, if her face had not been so pale, and her brave, hazel eyes so anxious. While I looked at her, surprised and only half understanding, she went on, before I could speak.

"I've come to propose something to you, which you may think a monstrous impertinence — perhaps a cruel insult. I'm afraid of you, because I love you dearly, and I can't bear to feel that maybe, in a few minutes, you will hate me."

"There's nothing in the world you could say or do to make me hate you, or even to *unlove* you, the least little bit," I answered. "I've known you only a few months, and I've never dared to tell you half how I adored you, for fear you'd think me pushing, or sentimental; but I do love you better than I've ever loved any woman in the world, since I was a tiny child, and my mother died."

"Thank you for telling me that, to-night," she said, in her sweet, low voice. "It makes things easier. And before I begin, I'll tell *you* something. If I did n't love you with quite an exceptional love, and believe you to be a very exceptional girl, I would n't be here on the errand that has brought me."

Then the coffee came, and we drank it, smiling at each other, as if we really had been soldiers, bracing our nerves for battle with a strange enemy, in a strange country — she, the captain; I, a poor little subaltern, ready to follow my superior officer anywhere, blindly.

There was no danger of our being interrupted, for

Lady Meldon had told the waiter to leave everything, unless she rang.

"Do you guess at all what I meant in my telegram?" she asked, after a little pause.

It was n't a moment for hesitation, and I answered quite frankly. "I have been able to think of only one thing. The last time we met, I said to you that I'd do anything in the world for Sir Miles Culver's happiness. And you promised, if the time ever came when I could do anything, that you'd let me know."

"You have guessed rightly," Lady Meldon almost whispered. "The time *may* have come. I'm not sure. You must tell me if I'm asking too much. And even if you say, 'no, it's *not* too much,' the plan I have in my mind may fail in spite of us both. But it can't even begin to be a plan — that is, it can't be tried as a plan — without your consent."

"But if it's for his good, I consent, without knowing what it is," I assured her.

"You must n't say that. You've no idea what I'm going to propose to you. You know that the operation on Laurie's spine was only a partial success."

"Yes, because you wrote that it was 'what they expected, but not what they hoped,' so I knew it must have been a disappointment, though the papers gave such encouraging reports of his health."

"Oh, the papers! They printed what the surgeons wished them to print. And neither Miles nor Laurie wants sympathy. Laurie writhes under the very thought of pity from strangers, and even from his friends. Miles is more indifferent to outside opinion, because in truth he suffers a thousand times more than Laurie does, and the world does n't count for him. It's two months since the operation, and Laurie is no nearer

to walking than he was before. He is still a dead man from the waist down, and he's almost killing Miles with his tortured repinings. Now, he has another flicker of hope. He won't see any of his old friends, but likes getting letters, and some one has written him about the new celebrity in Berlin, Doctor von Waldhausen, who has discovered or invented a serum for injecting into the spinal cord. Laurie made Miles write at once, giving a long account of the case, and asking the doctor's opinion, whether the serum might be used successfully. The German wrote back, saying that the fact of the first operation — the mending of the spine with gold links — being successful up to a certain point, would pave the way for further success with his discovery. Laurie is keyed up to the highest pitch of excitement, and is mad to have the experiment tried; but Von Waldhausen won't trust any one to do the thing, except himself. And to leave his practice in Berlin, come to England and stay long enough to watch the case for a month — that's the time needed, according to him — he asks — guess how much money?"

"Three thousand pounds," I hazarded.

"Ten. It would be preposterous, if it were n't true that every patient who comes to him at his own place for treatment pays from a thousand to two thousand pounds. He is the sensation of Europe for cases of spinal disease just now, and some of his cures seem almost miraculous. He has never had a case exactly like Laurie's — where the spine has been broken and mended, and the spinal cord bruised, but he professes to think that he might make a cure; and even for the slenderest chance of saving Laurie from his living death, Miles would give ten times ten thousand pounds,

if he had them to give. But he has not even got ten. The first operation was paid for by mortgaging Culver Castle. He would have sold it if he could, you know, even though Laurie made such a point of living there — but no buyer has been found, and — and — ”

I could not help breaking in, when she paused with a pathetic embarrassment. “And — oh, you darling, you’ve come to say I may buy the place after all. Thank you a thousand times. You will manage it for me. He need n’t know who — ”

“No, no! I could n’t manage that. I think just the same as I thought before. But there’s something else — a plan — I dare n’t say an inspiration, that has come to me. I have been lying awake over it. It’s given me no rest, night or day. If you had n’t said you would do *anything* to help him, I should n’t dare — ”

“Oh, don’t dare to speak of *not* daring! Tell me — tell me!” I implored her.

“This would mean, not one big, generous sacrifice, over and done with in a short time. It might mean — a life-long martyrdom. Now, don’t speak, my dear, dear child! I’m going to tell you what I mean. And no matter how hurt, how horrified you may be, I ask that you’ll hear me through to the end.”

I clasped my hands over my pounding heart, and listened.

“Just as you say that you are willing to make a great sacrifice for Miles, so Miles would gladly make any sacrifice which he could make and keep his self-respect — for Laurie. He could n’t accept charity — that must not even be offered. But if there were a rich woman — a girl — who would marry him without hoping for his love, it’s just possible that he would take

her for his wife — in name only. Don't speak yet! I have n't finished. That is *my* idea, not Miles'. No such solution of his difficulties has ever entered his head, I know. He has forgotten that there are girls in the world. He worships Helène Garde's memory, as he worshiped the reality. The very thought of love for any other woman, or hers for him, would be abhorrent. I'm as sure of this as if we had talked it over, though we never have. But if there were a woman ready to make a cold-blooded bargain — to take his name, his title, one of the oldest baronetcies in England — his position, and his splendid old home, in exchange for her money — it has occurred to me that for Laurie's sake he might consent, as a last resort. And it *is* a last resort. I see no other way. And it's for you to say whether I shall try to make Miles see this one."

When her meaning first broke on me, all my blood seemed to rush in a hot wave to my head. It drummed in my brain. I felt as if I were suffocating, and was afraid I might be going to faint, though I never have fainted in my life. With all my might I struggled to escape from the hot, red cloud which I felt boiling up before my eyes; and I must have controlled myself well enough to keep Lady Meldon from guessing what I suffered, or she would have stopped, frightened. And that was just what I would not have her do. Gradually, as she went on, the flame of my blood died down. I came out of the red cloud, and I was no longer burning hot, but very cold. My lips were dry, and my tongue might have been made of lead. But she was waiting for me to speak; and I spoke, with a voice that did not sound at all like mine. It was the voice of quite an old woman, a stranger to me.

"I am sure he would rather die than marry me," the strange old woman said.

"That may be. But he would not rather have Laurie die, or live on in an existence worse than death. You see, dear, it would be a *bargain*, as I told you. He would n't know you cared for him. He would think you one of those practical young women who are ready to exchange what they have for something they want and have n't got. Miles is one of the most modest of men, in spite of his pride; but if it were shown to him that an American heiress considered it worth while to pay a big price for being Lady Culver, and owning Culver Castle, he might admit that there was something in it, from her point of view."

"How could I — how *could* I let him think so vilely of me!" I faltered.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, sharply. "I might have known I was asking too much!"

This brought me to myself again. "No, you are not," I said. "Let him think what he must of me, if only I can help him in his great trouble."

"You mean that you would consent, if he would?"

"I mean — yes, I mean even that. But I don't quite understand. You — you don't want me to propose to Sir Miles? I don't think I could do that, you know!"

"Of course not, my poor child. My plan — so far as it has taken definite shape in my mind — is this. I'll tell Miles that I've been to Paris and seen you. He will remember you, for he thought you a nice, unaffected little girl. He used just those words in speaking of you to me, after the dinner at my house, when you met each other for the second time. I don't know exactly how I will put the thing — I'll trust to circum-

stances — but I shall somehow make it clear that you are one of those rich American girls, willing to buy an English title of distinction. I will suggest — hint to him — that he put his title in the market for *Laurie's* sake. That would be the one inducement. Oh, at first it's certain he'll turn from the thought of marrying — any one, not you in particular — with disgust! But if there is no question of love on your side, any more than on his, he may eventually see the advantages to be gained — for Laurie. If I find him likely to yield, I'll invite you to stay with me, and he can ask you to — to — ”

“ Yes, I know,” I broke in. “ Let's not talk of that part. I won't go back upon my word, Lady Meldon. If you think this is the only way in which I can be allowed to help, I will do it if he will.”

I turned my head away, then, lest she see the tears in my eyes; but she heard them in my voice, and jumping up, took me in her arms.

“ Child, you're an angel!” she cooed over me. “ No other girl in the world would consent to such an idea, as you are consenting — without any thought of yourself. No one but a *saint* could agree to let herself be misunderstood and despised — for, oh, my dear, if this marriage is made, Miles will misunderstand and despise you — at first.”

“ Always,” I whispered.

“ No, not always, I hope,” she tried to cheer me. “ His love, the passionate love of his heart, is buried in the grave with *Helène Garde* forever, I fear. But your sweetness, your goodness, must win some recognition, some grateful affection in the end, if indeed you are strong enough to play this martyr's part. Dearest, I should have no hope of success with any

woman but you. All others I can think of would drive Miles nearer to madness than he ever was even in the first agony of his loss. Who knows but, in the end, you may bring something like peace into his broken life — if you can keep your hand always, unflinchingly, on the rudder of your own soul?"

It was wonderful to hear her talk in this way to me — little Sandy Phayre. I knew that I deserved none of her praises, but I believed she was sincere, and so they comforted me a little. They comfort me still, in recalling them. And I need comfort, though this strange plan of Lady Meldon's may not — almost surely will not — come to anything.

She was quite right. It didn't matter about the black coffee. I shan't sleep to-night. I shall not even try to sleep. Lady Meldon is determined to go back to England early to-morrow morning. I shall get up at half past six, so that I may be ready to see her off.

October 15th.

She has telegraphed, asking me to visit her. No explanations, but I am afraid I can guess. Yes, I *am* afraid. I love him, and I never loved any other man, and never shall. Yet I would rather — just for my own happiness — die without ever seeing him again, than spend the rest of my life near him as I may have to spend it, if I hold myself ready to keep my word.

But I have accepted the invitation. I shall start to-morrow morning with Miss Timpson. I would leave her with Aunt Dora and Marguerite, only I know the poor dear soul would be unhappy. And she thinks Paris a "snare." She will be almost contented in England with me.

LADY MELDON'S HOUSE,
CHELSEA EMBANKMENT, *October 27th.*

If I had been told six months ago that I would be engaged to Sir Miles Culver, and that I would be the most miserable girl in the world on the day he asked me to marry him, I wouldn't have believed it. For one thing, it would not have seemed possible that he could ask me. But if I had believed that part, I would have imagined myself dazed with the joy and wonder of it.

Yet I am engaged to him. And we are to be married in a month. And I think no girl alive can be more unhappy than I am. Still, I would not undo what I have done, if I could. I shall trouble him as little as possible, *afterward*; and it is, oh, such a comfort to know that through me all his money troubles will be ended forever.

I should think no girl was ever proposed to in such a way. I hope not, for all girls' sakes.

He came up to London from Lancashire five days ago. I don't know whether Lady Meldon begged him to come, for a *special reason*, or whether he was coming in any case, and she asked me at this time, so that we might meet. She has not told me, or explained his being in town.

The first time he called, I did not see him. I was out all that afternoon, showing Miss Timpson highly elevating things at the British Museum. It was Lady Meldon who suggested my taking her; and even then I had a dim idea, *why*. Afterward, when she told me that Sir Miles had called, I was sure.

The next night he came to dinner.

Dear Book, I can't express to you how strange it was to meet him again, in Lady Meldon's drawing-

room, after all that has passed ; and especially, perhaps, after the talk she and I had in Paris. Lady Meldon did everything possible to keep me from being embarrassed and self-conscious ; and though I could n't help being both, just at first, I do believe that I was able to behave properly. Then, in a few minutes, I was thinking so much about him that I forgot my insignificant self for a while. It was only later that I began wondering again, whether Lady Meldon had "hinted" the things she had meant to hint ; whether he was here to carry out her plan, or because he did not suspect it yet, and would go at the first word from her. It was wearying, not to know. And yet I did not want to know. I felt I could not have controlled myself, if I had known for certain.

The moment I saw him, I realized exactly what Lady Meldon meant, when she had said it was as if another soul had come to live in his body and look out of his eyes. A stab of pain went through me, just as if a crooked, rusty pin had been stuck into my heart, as I met his almost unseeing gaze, when he got up to shake hands with me. I came down rather late, purposely, and he had been talking to Lady Meldon and Mr. Graeme. He had sat with his back toward the door, so, as he turned suddenly, the change in him broke upon me like a shock. And just because it was a shock, it seemed the more strange to be greeted by him in an ordinary commonplace manner.

"How do you do, Miss Phayre?" he said, quietly. "Lady Meldon told me you were staying with her."

The last time I saw him was in this very room — with Helène Garde and his brother Laurie. Now Helène is dead, and Laurie dead in life. Sir Miles

must have been thinking of that *other time*. I knew it. I could feel it. An electric current shot through his hand to mine, as they touched, and told me what he suffered in the recollection, though his voice and face were calm. But no, "calm" is hardly the word. They were frozen.

I scarcely knew, and I don't know now, what I had expected his manner to be like. I might have been sure, if I had thought, that it would be quiet and self-contained. He is not a man to show his feelings, even to close friends, I fancy, and I am — the merest stranger; an outsider.

There was no intimate talk at dinner between him and Lady Meldon and Mr. Graeme. He spoke pleasantly to me, occasionally, but only when Lady Meldon brought the conversation my way, by mentioning Paris, or Aunt Dora, or Marguerite. He asked how my cousin was, and said that he remembered her as one of the prettiest girls he had ever seen. We chatted a little of America, and of his mother, who had been an American. Not a word was said about Laurie. We dined early, because Mr. Graeme was taking me to the theater, to see young Henry Irving play "Charles the First." As soon as dinner was over, we had to leave, in a hurry.

Next day, Sir Miles came again, and had tea with Lady Meldon and me. Then, twice more; and each time we had very little to say to each other. Only, I was more used to seeing him, and he to me, perhaps.

To-day, when he arrived, Lady Meldon and I were drinking tea together. She sent for fresh tea, for Sir Miles, and when she had given it to him, one of the Highlanders appeared at the door with a message from her brother. Mr. Graeme wished to speak to her in his

study about some checks to be sent away. She excused herself; and I don't know whether the summons was a sort of coincidence, or had been arranged. I don't even know whether Sir Miles had been expected. My heart began to beat like a clock gone wrong. I would have given years of my life if I could have run away, or if a trap door had opened, and swallowed me up.

I began to try and make conversation, chattering at random; but Sir Miles looked straight at me with his grave, cold eyes — cold for me, though they had been warm and shining when they worshiped Helène Garde. I broke off in the midst of a sentence. I'm sure he had not heard, and I did not know, what I was saying.

"Miss Phayre," he said slowly, "will you forgive me if I speak frankly — brutally — to you?"

I bowed my head in assent. I could not have uttered a word just then.

He was silent for a few seconds. Then he went on. "It's more difficult than I realized. I — don't want to hurt you; and yet — I can't beat about the bush. Lady Meldon knows that I'm in want of money — not for myself, thank God, but for my brother. Her thought for me, was a rich wife — a woman who would take what I have to give, and neither ask nor want anything I — have n't to give. She — fancied, I don't quite know on what foundation, that you would be willing to marry a man who could offer you a title and — and some sort of position in society in this country, in exchange for as much of your fortune as might be needed. Is she right in believing this?"

"Yes," I answered, in a voice so low I was afraid

he could not hear, and that I should have to make the effort of repeating the word again.

Involuntarily I looked up, when he did not reply at once. He was looking away, his face hard with contempt of me — almost disgust. I knew how he scorned me for consenting, and how he hated himself for the thing he had to do. But if he could only have seen a little way down into my heart, perhaps he would not have loathed me so utterly. Yet that is what I must never let him do — *see into my heart*. Lady Meldon warned me against it. And his next words showed me how right she was, if I were to help him at all.

“Very well,” he said, icily. “That simplifies matters from now on, as we understand each other. Nothing would tempt me to marry, for her money, a girl or woman capable of caring for me. I could n’t do that, even for my brother’s sake — though he’s all I have to live for, and there’s little I would n’t stoop to, for the saving of him — if he can be saved. But to you, I am not a man. I’m a handle on which a title has been hung. I offer you the title, and everything that goes with it. You’ve heard of Culver Castle, I suppose. It has a good deal of history hanging to it: and if you care to spend some of your money in repairs, you’ll have a home you need n’t be ashamed of. The only trouble is, I fear you’ll have to tolerate my brother there, as he has a fancy for living in the place. If it were n’t for that fancy — but I need n’t go into further explanation. In these circumstances, and for these reasons, are you willing to marry me?”

“Yes,” I said again.

“It’s very good of you,” he replied, as perfunc-

torily as if I'd promised to engage him a housemaid the next time I passed a servants' registry.

A wild desire to burst out laughing, hysterically, seized me. I fought against it, frightened. What would he have done, what would he not have thought, if I had begun to giggle? He could n't have guessed that it would have been sadder than crying.

"I shall trouble you as little as possible," he assured me. "I'm afraid I must ask you to live under the same roof with me when you are — my wife" (how he hated to speak that word, which must have been sweet as honey once, in his thoughts of another!), "for neither you nor I would care to stir up unpleasant gossip. But you'll be free to live your own life. I say that, feeling sure you're a woman to be trusted. You are very young, and naturally you like amusement. Don't think that there's any danger of your being kept a prisoner month in and month out, in a dreary house with an invalid and a — misanthrope. Lady Meldon is fond of you, and you can always count on her as a friend who will be useful in taking you about."

"Oh, of course," I said, because I had to say something. And if the words sounded miserably inept and frivolous in my own ears, how much worse they must have sounded in his.

"I suppose, then," he went on, with an effort which I saw and pitied, "we might as well get it all over as soon as possible. When would you — be willing to marry me?"

"When you like," I replied, knowing only too surely that it would be satisfactory to him, for Laurie's sake, to have matters settled quickly.

"Could you be ready in a month?"

"Yes."

"What about one month from to-day, then? Would that suit you?"

"Quite well." And again I almost broke out into laughter that must have ended in tears, if I'd let it begin. It was rather like receiving an invitation to a house-party, for a certain date, and accepting it.

"Thank you. But — there is one thing more. I know I have no right to ask such a favor — suggest your giving up anything which would please you — when I can do so little to please you in return; yet — I must tell you it would be repulsive to me to have a big wedding, with a lot of people."

"Oh, and to me too," I broke in, to reassure him. "I — I've always thought I should hate a fashionable wedding, because —" But I cut myself short quickly. Silly, sentimental little idiot that I was, I had almost treated him to a theory of mine about weddings being sacred occasions, when a girl wanted only her best friends near her! *This* wedding, so far from being sacred, was going to be a profanation for him of his soul's sanctuary, and he was steeling himself to the shame of it for Laurie's sake. He must believe me to be one of those hard, calculating, modern young women to whom nothing is sacred, least of all, a marriage of convenience, and I realized, through the smarting pain of being misjudged, that it was better for Sir Miles to go on believing me such a person. For him to guess that I could love him, or try to make him love me, would add intolerably to the weight of his burden. Besides it would have been silly to babble about childish dreams of my own wedding. I *was* glad that I managed to shut myself up in time.

"Let us have everything as quiet as possible," I hurried on. "No one need come except Lady Meldon, or any other friends you want, and my aunt and cousin."

"I'm thankful you feel as I do," he said. "I — I'm really grateful. What would you think of being married in a registry-office?"

But I could n't consent to this. I thought even Lady Meldon would not have bidden me to say yes. "Oh, please, let it be in a church," I pleaded.

"Certainly, if you wish," he replied, almost harshly. Then, as if fearing he had been unkind, he added, "Have it wherever you like."

That made it rather worse! But he had meant well toward me. It was only too easy to see how he hated the horrid necessity forced upon him, and hating it, would have been glad to have the ceremony as different as possible, from that which would have made him Helène's husband. I felt this, as if I'd been flayed alive, and all the bleeding ends of my nerves exposed to every touch. But I told myself, and I have been telling myself ever since, that I must not, *must not* be so sensitive, if my life in future is to be bearable — if I am to keep my soul from fainting so utterly that I fail *him*.

I believe, dear Book, that I have repeated to you our very words; for all he said seems to have been branded on my brain.

In foolish, sweet old days at school, or at home in San Francisco, looking down from my window toward the Golden Gate in sunset and moonlight, I have dreamed dreams of "getting engaged."

And this is the way that my dream has come true!

SAVOY HOTEL,
November 1st.

We are back in our old rooms here again, Aunt Dora, Marguerite and I. I feel as if I had lived ten years since we first arrived at the Savoy last May. Of course, I had to write to Aunt Dora about my being engaged to Sir Miles, and she brought Marguerite from Paris to London next day. I could n't help being a little amused at their amazement, and their frankness in showing it — rather a bitter amusement. How odd that you can have a heart as heavy as the biggest weight of a grandfather clock, and yet see the funny side of things, just the same as when you were happy! I wonder if it's like that with everybody, or if I'm different! . . . I remember Miss Timpson's remarking once, when I made some more or less lively remark, while a huge splinter was being extracted from under my thumb-nail, that, "Sandy Phayre would laugh on her death-bed." As she said this with shocked reproach, I suppose a death-bed laugh would be considered reprehensible in a decorous young woman. None but Beau Brummels and Court wits are privileged to indulge in such frivolity, and then only for the sake of their biographers.

Aunt Dora wired: "Congratulations," though she brought me up to give "good wishes" to a bride elect, and "congratulations" to the bridegroom. No doubt she thought me the "exception that proves the rule," a favorite expression of hers which I can't understand, and she can't explain. She wired also that I was to engage rooms at the Savoy, so "the family could keep together until after the wedding."

"You have certainly given us a surprise," began Aunt Dora, the moment I met them at Victoria. "If

any one had asked *me*, I should have said Sir Miles Culver was the last man to — but I don't want to hurt your feelings. And I'm sure I hope you'll be happy, though I'm afraid his affairs must be in a *very* bad way."

"How did you manage to bring it off, dear?" Marguerite wanted to know.

"It just happened," I replied, with one of those smiles which you feel may drop off your face and break, if you are n't careful. But I was careful.

"It was quick work, too," she went on. "Honestly I could n't have believed you capable of it! But one never can tell with quiet little things like you. Every one thought he was broken-hearted over Helène Garde! Anyhow, he seems to have kept an eye on the main chance."

"You're not very complimentary to either of us," I said, still hanging on to the chipped edges of my smile.

"We're too old chums to stand on ceremony with each other," she excused herself. "I suppose you don't expect me or any one else to believe he's fallen dead in love with you — after Helène Garde?"

"No," I had to admit, dully. I had never thought what people would be saying. I tried to remind myself that it did n't matter a bit, to Sir Miles or me; but it was a sharp pin-prick to think that others besides Marguerite were pronouncing him mercenary, and me a designing minx. Why is it that pin-pricks are so much worse than sword-thrusts? I suppose because it hardly seems worth while to use up your courage for a mere pin-prick, whereas you make it a shield between your heart and sword-thrusts.

Suddenly I was frightened, wondering if, perhaps, after all, I *was* a minx — a minx purring over its own good intentions? I fancy that minxes, whatever they

are, do purr a good deal. I must look them up in the encyclopedia, now I'm in danger of joining the minx family.

What if, meaning to do good to Sir Miles in the one way which seemed possible, I have really been monstrously selfish, in *grabbing* him at all costs for myself? It is a fearful thought. Oh, I do hope I am not such a dreadful, self-deceived humbug!

November 8th.

Aunt Dora, Marguerite and I have been shopping, the last few days — shopping fast and furiously. A trousseau had n't occurred to me. *Real* brides have trousseaux: brides whose husbands are in love with them, and are interested in their clothes. I am not a real bride, only just a shadowy, proxy sort of bride, and Sir Miles won't care whether I'm dressed in finest silk and lace, or wrapped up in brown paper, tied with a string. Still, I could n't say anything of that sort to Aunt Dora. For *his* sake, I could n't say it. I did murmur something vague about having the simplest kind of clothes, and not needing many, as there was to be no honeymoon journey, and I should lead a retired life for awhile, on account of Laurie.

"What of that?" asked Aunt Dora. "Self-respect requires you to dress well, if you don't show yourself outside Culver Castle for six months. In *my* day, young women dressed to please their husbands, when they married, not to please *Society*."

"Oh, very well," I said hastily, "I'll do just what you think best."

So I have been doing what she thinks best. When dear Lady Meldon called yesterday, and heard a few details of the "trousseau" from Aunt Dora, we caught

each other's eyes sadly and understandingly. Tears were n't far from mine; but I had grown quite clever about managing my happy smile, and not once has it fallen off and broken, when I have been with people.

There is so little time before the wedding, that Aunt Dora has been buying me a great many things ready made. I had no idea what lovely "confections" could be snatched from Bond Street shops at a moment's notice. Already I am provided with a dream-like array of what Marguerite gayly calls "undies." And the things really are like the "stuff that dreams are made of": delicate films held together by wreaths of embroidery and threaded ribbons. Aunt Dora explained that, though she did not approve of young girls wearing garments of this sort, as it hardly seemed modest, they were "correct for a trousseau."

My silk stockings used not to cost more than two or three dollars a pair; now I have dozens for which I have paid as much as many women, I suppose, pay for their best dresses. I have gold shoes, silver shoes and bronze shoes, suède shoes of every color. I have blouses, each one of which must have kept a famous French milliner awake at least two nights designing it. I have fifteen new hats to every idea I've got to put under them. They — the hats, not the ideas — were magically becoming to me at the milliner's, when I tried them on, but, at home, each fault in my features is accentuated by their eccentricities. The only remedy I can think of, is to give most of them to Marguerite.

I once heard a man say, "You always know whether a woman thinks she's beautiful or not, by the shape of the hats she buys." But the real truth is, we poor female things look quite incredibly pretty in a hat

shop. We are so delighted with our new-found charm, that, in the excitement of the moment, we buy every hat we see, never again to look the same in them! This is puzzling, but I think all women know it to be true.

Aunt Dora saw to it that a proper announcement was put in the *Morning Post*. I think she believes that no engagement can be legal in England until it has been notified by that paper. She had studied up the proper form; and read out the lines with gusto: "A marriage has been arranged, and will take place —" I longed to stop my ears, remembering how, only a little more than six months ago, Marguerite read aloud the same words, in this very room, with only one difference: *the name of the bride*. I hope with all my heart that Sir Miles has not seen the notice. Somehow, I can't imagine him brooding over the *Morning Post*.

He never comes here, "of course," I was going to add. And I have added it. When Aunt Dora asked why he did n't call, I glibly made the excuse that "it's impossible for him to leave his brother Laurie." Marguerite asked me the other day if he wrote often, and I said "Yes, I'd heard from him several times." This is perfectly true. I did n't need to tell that there were only about six lines in each letter, and that they were all about business. I don't like being pitied; and I can't bear to have Sir Miles misjudged by minds not worthy to criticize him. Aunt Dora and Marguerite are n't capable of realizing how noble he is, in sacrificing himself for his brother. I should *hate* my relations, if they dared misconstrue his motives, so I try to make them think he really quite likes me.

By the way, Marguerite suddenly inquired this

morning if I called him "Sir Miles" still, when I spoke to him, as when I spoke of him. I said "yes," rather sheepishly, and she laughed.

"You'd better begin to practice a little on plain Miles," she advised me.

But I shall never, never be able to call him Miles, to his face! Of course, he won't expect or wish it — in our circumstances. Still, I suppose it will sound rather odd if I say "Sir Miles" before people, *afterward*. And I must n't do anything to cause remark. I know I shall have to be careful. I will just call him "you," and he will call me "you," no doubt, for he certainly can't go on saying "Miss Phayre" when — I'm no longer Miss Phayre.

Dear Book I will tell you this secret — I should *love* to hear him call me "Sandra," if only once. Nobody has ever called me "Sandra" except Lady Meldon, and I had to ask her to do it. "Sandy" is more suitable to me, I know. It is insignificant sounding, and therefore just right for me; but I have always liked the pet name of "Sandra," for the long, old-fashioned "Cassandra" they gave me in memory of my mother; and I'm sure she would have called me Sandra, if she had lived.

November 12th.

All the business part is over, thank Heaven, the settlements, and those stupid bothers. With the help of a perfect darling of an old lawyer, just like the family ones in melodramas (white hair and all) I have done my best to make Sir Miles Culver's sacrifice worth while, for Laurie's sake.

This morning came wedding presents from Lady Meldon and Mr. Graeme. His is a sampler worked

by Mary Stuart, and given to an ancestress of the Graemes. He had a pair of these samplers, and now he gives me the prettier of the two. If I needed a proof of his real affection, I have it. Dear old man! "May you be as happy as you deserve to be, is the sincere wish of your friend," he has scribbled on his visiting card. "As happy as I deserve to be!" That's an unknown quantity.

My sweet Lady Meldon sends me a diamond star, mounted on a fillet for my hair. "Wear this when you can, and think of me," she says. And then, underlined: "This is the *star of hope*."

Americans in London are showering beautiful things on me. From the Jewetts and their mother (who has come over to join them) there is a lovely tiara. I have written to thank them, and quoted what Marguerite said, when the case was opened: "A married woman without a tiara is as great a failure as a girl who has never been proposed to."

I suppose most brides-elect are delighted with their presents, and in a state of beatific excitement over each new parcel that arrives. But I feel somehow as if I had no right to wedding-gifts, and as if I were accepting them under false pretenses.

Just now, in the midst of my writing, came a letter from *him*, the first I have had not on business of one sort or other: and even this is almost on business. At least, it's written in a business-like way. He says: "I ought to have told you, when we met the other day, how much I regret not having any family jewels to send you. There were some, which you might have thought worth accepting, if only to be reset; but lately they have had to go, not being legally heirlooms. Yours very sincerely, Miles Culver."

"Yours very sincerely, Miles Culver!"

I never knew before what a stiff way that is of signing a letter. But how else should he sign to me?

November 27th.

My wedding morning!

At least, I think it is — or shall I wake up, and never even have met Sir Miles? But I have pinched my arm, very hard, to see whether I'm asleep or not, and, as it looks inclined to turn black and blue, I supposed I must be awake.

I had my breakfast in my own room, and have not let anybody in, except Miss Timpson. Now she has gone, and I am writing this in my dressing-gown, with my hair down my back. My one real beauty, and I do believe it is a beauty; though Aunt Dora says it's nothing to my mother's hair, which reached far below her waist. But mine isn't of much use to me as a beauty, for hardly any one ever sees it let down, and the only person whose admiration I would go on my knees for, will never know that I don't wear a "transformation" and three "switches."

It's quite early — only half-past nine — but I've been up for nearly two hours; I was so glad when getting-up time came, for I have been awake the whole night, thinking of many things. Still, I don't feel tired — only about a hundred times more serious than I ever felt in my life.

Lady Meldon wanted me to stay with her, and be married from her house, but that would have hurt Aunt Dora's feelings — a sad ending of our family life together. This is so unlike a real proper wedding, that its details don't matter much, perhaps. The

only thing is, to believe they don't matter, and I've not quite steeled myself to this point yet.

Last night, as I lay wide awake, I kept saying over and over to myself, "To-morrow will be your wedding-day." Now, to-morrow has come, and what a different wedding-day it is from what I used to plan at school!

To begin with, it's raining cats and dogs, and a whole menagerie of other drowned animals, out of a thick yellow sky. Even the river, seen from my window, for once is not beautiful. In my dreams, the wedding-day was brilliant with sunlight, for "blessed is the bride the sun shines on." I want so much to be "blessed"! I can't be blessed in love, as I used calmly to take it for granted I would be when my time came. I must be content with the blessed satisfaction of thinking that through me the one I love best, and honor the most in all the world, has been relieved from wearying anxiety. I must stop and think, and be thankful for that, if I'm rather downhearted sometimes. But Lady Meldon has strictly forbidden me to be downhearted.

She came to see Sandy Phayre for the last time, and we had a strange talk, which I mean never to forget. Not that I could forget, if I tried; but I shall need to remind myself of it often. All the good advice she gave me before, she gave me again, even more earnestly and emphatically; and new advice, besides, some of which may be rather hard to follow.

Her face was kind as a mother's face, and her arms warm as a mother's, as she drew me down on her lap yesterday, in this room, on this very sofa, where I am now curled up to write Sandy Phayre's last words in the Self-Book. But, dear Book, they won't be Sandy

Somebody else's last words. I shall need you all the more — by and by, I foresee. And I think you will be a comfort to me, when I want comfort perhaps more than I have ever wanted it yet.

"How sweet you are!" I whispered to Lady Meldon, as she held me close, and let me nestle my head down on her shoulder. "Do you know, I've never sat on any one's lap since my mother died, when I was two and a half? — except Miss Timpson's, when I was so small she had to take me on her knee to button my shoes."

"You poor little darling!" cried my dear lady. "You ought to have all the love in the world. You ought to be going from my arms to the arms of a man who would adore you. And it's I — I who love and appreciate you for what you are — who have robbed you of — of your birthright."

I begged her not to say that, because I would n't turn back if I could; but she went on, petting me as if I were a child who had been hurt and must be comforted. "You are made for love," she said, "and ought to have it, and give it, every minute of your life, just as you breathe."

"Oh, I shall *give* it!" I gurgled from the comfortable shelter of her shoulder, which made me feel, just for the moment, as if I were in a harbor where no sorrow could reach me. And I laughed faintly.

"Ah, there's the pity!" she murmured. "Yes, you will give love, dear. Your love will be like a clear spring pouring out a generous flood in a hidden place where no one can see or know its beauty — though thousands are dying of thirst for such a draught. And yet — your reward must come. I believe so strongly that pure goodness and unselfishness

must win in the end. I've said this before — and I say it again. Have no end of patience. You'll need it. For at first, because you love Miles so well, your life with him will be heart-breaking. If he thinks of you at all, it will be with the coldest misunderstanding; though I do him the justice to be sure he'll never willingly wound you. You'll live near each other, yet there'll be a dead woman's image between you and him. He will never forget Helène Garde. She was worth remembering — a glorious creature — there's no denying that. But truly, I look forward to the day when you and Miles will be the best of comrades, even though the roses of his one great romance are faded."

"I should be glad if I might earn his friendship," I answered. And, oh, dear Book, I am ashamed to confess that for a minute — a long, bad minute — I was tempted to tell Lady Meldon about Helène Garde and Laurie Culver. I was wickedly jealous of her tribute to Helène — a "glorious creature, worth remembering." I wanted to hear her break out against Helène. I'm afraid I wanted to hear her exclaim that Miles ought to know the truth about her treachery. But I stifled the wish, hurriedly and almost furiously, as one pours water on flames to put them out quickly, and then stamps them down as they die. I know then, and I know even more surely now, that it was a wicked wish. For the memory of Helène, beautiful and loving and true, is the only light left to shine dimly upon Miles' life now, redeeming his dark way from utter blackness. And as there is *no* good to be gained for him or any one else by telling Lady Meldon what I saw, my telling her would be a mean and spiteful, *cat-tish* thing. Fancy being a cat on one's wedding eve!

She went on to remind me — the dear woman — how I must bid my heart be strong because, if real friendship were to come for Miles and me, it would have to come slowly, slowly, with time, almost as slowly as the growth of stalactites, forming from one drop of water after another. "Those drops of water may be your bitter tears, my child," she said softly. "But they must fall in secret. You must n't even let him see you with red eyelids, which will betray that you have a heart to feel; or if you do, all the good we want to do him will be undone. He's tragic enough as it is, poor fellow, without having to feel that a girl's soul is starving for light and air in his gloomy house. Don't let the house be gloomy! Redeem it from sadness, but as quietly as a ray of sunshine that steals into a dark room. Be your everyday self, natural and bright, and quaint, seeing the funny side of things through all. If you *can* be all that, our experiment may be a success in more ways than one. Who knows? You may be able to save him from madness and despair. Something tells me that you will. Have courage — have courage, on your wedding eve!"

"I have courage," I answered, "because I mean to do my very best for him, whatever happens; and that gives me courage — just to hope I *may* help. And don't pity me. Doing something for him is like doing it for myself — a glorified, superself. I love Sir Miles Culver so much, and I've loved him so long, that he's really my *Me* — the only Me worth bothering about."

That made us both laugh a little, and we were better for laughing. I felt, when Lady Meldon went away, as if I had taken a strong tonic, and the effect has lasted; for though I am desperately nervous, I'm not deadly frightened, as I was before.

When I used to dream, in my schoolgirlish way, of falling in love and being married, I never imagined myself loving a man as I love Miles. (You see, my Book, I am beginning to call him Miles without the handle, when speaking to you, though I can't yet to any one else, not even Lady Meldon.)

Of course, it never occurred to me that I could possibly marry my ideal hero; and I was n't so sentimental as to vow that I would live and die an old maid unless I could have the One Man. I imagined myself slipping pleasantly and quietly (not falling) in love with some nice young American, who liked me for myself, not a bit for my money. I used to long to be *important* to some one; to have, all for my own, a human being who cared more for me than for any one else on earth. I could never see why anybody *should* care for me, while there were so many lovely girls in the world; but, I suppose because I'm a born optimist, I hoped that such a good thing might somehow happen. I used to picture myself being very happy with the nice man, living in dear California, among my friends, and having two perfectly adorable children; first a boy, then a girl; the boy dark, with wonderful eyes; the girl fair, with little round yellow curls all over her head, like golden bees. I imagined those two darlings growing up, the boy telling me all about his adventures at school, and even his fights. I thought how the girl and I would play dolls together, and how I would be to her all that my darling mother would have been to me if she had lived.

Now, here is my wedding-day, and miraculously I am marrying my ideal hero. I worship him with such a love as I could never have given that nice boy who roamed in my imagination — such a love as I could not

have understood, till one day I found it in my heart, beating with my blood, as necessary to my life as the air I take into my lungs. Yet, though I am to be my hero's wife, and live close to him, there's no question of "happiness" for me, in the way women look for happiness when they marry. Living side by side, he will be as far from me as the north pole from the south — oh, such a cold and frigid north pole, and such a warm, weak, wobbly little south pole, hardly able to stand up by itself! As for the boy with dark, wonderful eyes, and the girlie with curls like clustering golden bees, they will never come any nearer to me than they are now. I can be their mother only in my dreams; but, thank God for the house of dreams, and this book, which is the key of that house. I must keep the rooms in the house warm and bright, always ready to walk into when I am weary and chilled.

Going to marry Miles Culver to-day — *me!* I can't believe it, or be grammatical about it.

I wonder — I wonder — but no, it's not possible. That glass case just like a clock-case, or the kind that covers but does not hide stuffed birds and phenomenal fishes, will not gently shut down over Miles and me, after to-day, as it does over other married couples, making a transparent barrier between them and the rest of the world. No, it can't be like that with us. There'll be no glass case — except to separate Miles from me.

I must begin to think of calling Miss Timpson and getting ready for my wedding. My dress is so ridiculously pretty. I'm afraid it will seem absurd to Miles. But perhaps he will hardly notice, except to see that he has a white thing, all robed and veiled in white, standing by his side, and going through a ceremony.

Aunt Dora would make me wear the conventional white wedding gown and veil, though nobody outside is coming to see us married, except Lady Meldon and Mr. Graeme. Afterward, I shall have the things packed away, for neither I nor any one else will ever wish to look at them again.

CULVER CASTLE,
My wedding night.

We have come to Culver Castle. It was a long journey, and we arrived very late, but naturally Miles wanted to reach Laurie as soon as possible. He has not been away from his brother for more than forty-eight hours since the accident.

This has seemed like many strange days — not one of them real days — crowded into one; but so far from being tired, I feel as if I were a harp keyed up very tightly, with unseen spirit-hands improvising a poignant melody that leaves no string untouched. It is a haunting melody, and I shall never forget the music of it as long as I may live; yet it is not probable that just the same notes will ever be struck upon my soul again.

We were married at a dear little church in Chelsea, with which I fell in love last summer. It is full of history, and old oak, and sweet, half-sad dreams. I have never heard of any one else's being married in that church, but it suited our kind of wedding — if any church could. And Miles did not care where we were married. This church's being near Lady Meldon's house perhaps commended it to him; for I think all the love he has left, except for his brother, is given to Lady Meldon, his best and dearest friend.

The rain was still pouring when we started from the

Savoy Hotel for Chelsea; and there was such a leaky old canopy for the bride to pass under that the sky wept tears of pity on my head. Inside the church were a few lights, dim as stars twinkling through holes in ragged clouds. Without these gas jets, it would have been almost pitch dark, owing to the gloom out of doors; and even as it was, in my white dress and long veil, I must have looked like a pale, flitting wraith as I went up the aisle.

I had not wanted people at the wedding, not even the Jewetts, who hinted to be asked; but the gray, almost empty church, with only Lady Meldon and Mr. Graeme and tearful Miss Timpson sitting in front pews, seemed full of echoes and crowding ghosts.

It was bitterly cold, too, with a grim, forbidding chill that was like the touch of iron; and I felt very young and little, and a stranger in a strange land. Suddenly my eyelids began to sting, and I was afraid that I was going to cry; but when I saw the clergyman in his white surplice — the only whiteness in church besides mine — and Miles waiting there, the tears dried up as if they had been burnt away.

My heart had been feeling like a very cold fish out of water, refusing to believe itself dead, though torn off a hook, and giving a heavy flop now and then. At sight of Miles it miraculously turned back into a real heart, but a heart on a gridiron over a hot fire. It leaped and jumped, and sent the blood pumping through my veins until it seemed as if it must spout out of my temples.

By the time I came up to the chancel, and Miles met me there, my eyes were so accustomed to the gloom that I saw him with a wonderful vividness, as I had never seen him before. There was a strange,

sudden clearness of every feature, even every detail of his clothing, such as a flash of lightning gives, flaming white out of darkness. Only the unnatural, pale light did not die. It gleamed all around Miles and all over him, leaving everything and every one else veiled in deep, purplish twilight. Of course I imagined this effect, but it was very real for me.

Miles looked alarmingly tall and straight, and though his face was blanched by this strange illuminating flash, which my spirit flung upon it, like a searchlight, his eyes were very dark, as if with despair. For a moment, in my excitement, I had forgotten *Helène Garde*, and all that going through such a ceremony with another woman must seem to him, but his eyes made me remember. I longed to fall on my knees and beg him to forgive me for marrying him, and I trembled so much that I was thankful when the time came, in the service, to kneel down. I dropped, rather than knelt properly. But it was good to be on my knees and pray.

Always I knew that the marriage service was very, very solemn, though I dared not read the words over in the prayer-book, since being engaged to Miles, lest I should lose courage to go through it, knowing what a mockery this marriage would be for him. But I had not realized quite how sacredly solemn the service would sound, when read out by the beautiful, grave voice of a clergyman, in a dim old English church, and when I — I — would have to answer the questions.

I think, even at that eleventh hour, if Miles' voice had faltered, I should have had to give it all up. But he spoke firmly and clearly, without the slightest hesitation, and there was, or it seemed so to me, a noble thrill in his tone, like that in the voice of a

martyr answering an inquisitor. And Miles *is* a martyr. He is sacrificing himself for his brother Laurie. All I can do, trying my very best, is to make the martyrdom not quite so terrible as he must be expecting.

The service was an ordeal; but, though I did n't realize it then — the worst was to come. When we had signed our names in the register, in the vestry, I realized for the first time that I had to be alone with Miles, going back to the Savoy. I can't express my sensations otherwise than to say I felt like a wretched little mouse being put, for a scientific experiment, into a vacuum, when I stood under the leaky canopy again, being helped into a closed motor-car by a cold, polite stranger, who was — *my husband*. Just as I was getting into the car, and stepping on the front of my wedding-dress, a drop of rain, which felt as big and hard as an egg, came plop through my cap-shaped veil into the parting of my hair. I quite jumped, as if it had been a thunderbolt, or a judgment, and tumbled into the motor-car, anyhow.

Luckily it *was* a motor-car, so it did n't take us very long to get back to the Savoy, where our wedding-feast — heaven save the mark! — was to be. But it seemed years, and I felt myself getting older and more like a crumbling, undermined, perfectly uninteresting ruin every minute. Once there was a block in the traffic, and then I could have screamed.

I wonder how many times, in silly, old, school-girl days, I thought about being married, or talked of it with other girls as silly as myself, and discussed what the bridegroom would do in the carriage (motors did n't occur to us) on the way home from the wedding.

Our fixed idea — I suppose the fixed idea of every



"HELPED INTO A MOTOR-CAR BY A COLD, POLITE STRANGER,
WHO WAS—MY HUSBAND!"—Page 102

girl is the same — was, that the minute the carriage set off, the bridegroom would say, “At last, my own darling, you are mine, and we are alone together. How can I tell how I worship my adored little bride, and how happy I pray to make her!” or words to that effect.

I don't suppose Miles prayed at all, while we knelt side by side in church. What was there for him to pray about? though I was praying hard — hard — with all my might, wordlessly, and I hardly knew for what in the future. Mostly, I prayed for him, I think, as I remember now; that he would be able to bear me, and not be too desperately miserable. Anyhow, if he did pray, he would n't have prayed to make me happy, for he had, and has, no idea that my happiness depends on him. And instead of saying those sweet, conventional things, which girls dream of, at first he said nothing at all. He sat as far as possible from me, in the nice wide motor-car, and stared out of the rain-blurred window, at all the lucky men who had n't just been tied for life to uninteresting girls.

At school we supposed that, as a matter of course, our bridegrooms would put their arms round us, on the way home from the church, press our hands, and gaze thrillingly into our eyes. Miles, who has never touched me except to shake hands politely, when necessary, and to put on my wedding-ring (I could feel it, either burning hot or freezing cold, I could n't be quite sure which, on my third finger), thoughtfully folded and unfolded a new pair of gloves, when he stopped looking out of the window. But when we got into the block in the traffic, he began to speak. I dare say many a girl has wondered what would be “his” first words when she and “he” were left alone.

The first words of my husband were, "I trust you did n't get wet. The rain was coming through that canopy."

"Oh, only a drop or two," I reassured him, cheerfully. "Did any fall on you?"

"I did n't notice. I should think not," said he. "I hope you're not cold."

"Not at all. I'm quite warm and comfortable, thank you," was my reply; and suddenly I could n't help thinking of first conversations in French lesson-books. How awful if we have to go on for years, whenever we happen to be together, making polite talk like this!

Then, the ice being broken, he went on to say that he hoped I would not much mind the long journey to Lancashire, and arriving late at Culver Castle.

"It was very good of you," he remarked, "to give up a wedding-trip, and let me take you home at once. I'm afraid you think me horribly selfish and inconsiderate not even to stop and let you rest somewhere for a few hours on the way. But — you know — you understood before — how Laurie needs me, and —"

"Oh, it's much the best thing," I hurried to break in. "I'm not a bit tired. It is n't like a big wedding" (I wished I had n't said that, the instant the words were spoken), "and there's been nothing to wear me out." Then I longed to say that I hoped his brother would not dislike me; but it seemed a liberty, from me to him; so I stopped short. He stopped short, too, when he had stiffly murmured something about my being "extremely considerate." And if it had n't seemed too absurd to think of such a thing in connection with such a man, I should almost have fancied that he was as uncomfortably shy with me as I with him.

I was thankful for both our sakes when we arrived at the Savoy; though it must have been horrid for him, being made conspicuous by that wretched bridal get-up of mine, which Aunt Dora had insisted on. If only she'd let me wear a traveling-dress, all would have been well. Luckily, however, there were very few people about; and Lady Meldon and Mr. Graeme grouped round me as well as they could, till I could be whisked out of sight. Miles must have been execrating Aunt Dora from the bottom of his heart, especially for not allowing me to be married from Lady Meldon's.

We had gorgeous food, in our own sitting-room, which was so heavily scented with orange blossoms from the south that I felt giddy. There was a huge wedding-cake, too, rather like a snow-capped, medieval fortress. Aunt Dora insists on sending it after us, to Culver Castle, and misguided Mr. Graeme made a brave attempt at drinking our health. It was all very dreadful, but may have struck Miles as grimly funny, according to his mood, and anyway, at last it was over. I hardly dared glance at him, and only breathed freely when I could escape. But I had not realized that there were trying moments in store for me, in my own room with Miss Timpson.

I knew that she was loving me in her fierce, inarticulate way, more than ever before, maybe; yet she grumbled at everything. According to her, the wedding was a "hole in the corner affair," unworthy of my father's daughter, and, in her opinion, he would "turn in his grave if he could have seen them marrying me off in a hurry, just as if I were a parcel being handed over the counter." "It's all these English!" she snorted. "I can't abide their proud manners. As if Americans was n't their equals, and betters. Don't

you let yourself be put upon. That's *my* advice. Don't let yourself be put upon."

"There's no danger that any one will try," I argued.

"I'm not so sure!" she retorted, looking as if she would have a great deal more to say, with a little encouragement. But I gave her none. I hurried her as much as I dared, while she helped me get into my traveling things. We had no intimate talk, yet her eyes were wistful. I knew they were asking, "Are you happy? Do you love this man, you have said so little about, and seen so seldom? Above all, does he love you?"

I am afraid that these questions in my old nurse's eyes may grow embarrassing as time goes on, but I can't part with her; and her lips will never translate into words the questions that her eyes ask.

Miss Timpson went to the railway-station in one of the motors with my small luggage; which meant that I had a second trip alone with Miles. But this was not so bad as the first. There were things that could be talked about, and I talked about them. The journey how long it would be? the historical interest of Culver Castle, of which Lady Meldon had often spoken. It was a conversation meant to conceal thought.

I feared that Sir Miles might have considered it necessary to engage a whole compartment in the railway-carriage. But he had n't. We had for a chaperon a fussy old man with a rug; and next door to us was Miss Timpson, whom I would never dream of sending anywhere second-class. What is good enough for me, is only just good enough for her. She came and peeped in two or three times, to inquire how I was

getting on, and found me wading slowly through a pile of papers and magazines which Miles had bought.

By and by the fussy old man and his rug got out. He was not traveling far north; but at the same station a girl and a boy came in. They looked no more than children, yet I felt sure, somehow, that they were bride and bridegroom, even before the rice fell off the brim of her hat, when she stooped down. There were people to see the little couple off, but as they were late, and the train moved out almost as they flung themselves in, I saw only a waving of handkerchiefs, and a bunch of smiling faces.

I pretended to drop asleep after the bride and bridegroom — the *real* bride and bridegroom — arrived, for they were so desperately in love with each other, that I should have wanted to be silly, and cry, if I'd been tempted to glance at them over the top of my papers. *They* would have reserved a carriage, if they could have afforded it, no doubt, but they were only a humble, provincial people, to whom traveling first-class was a honeymoon extravagance. Her clothes were rather pathetic, and her brand new dressing-bag could not have cost more than a sovereign; yet she seemed to me one of the richest people in the whole world. Though my eyes were shut, I know that he was holding her hand furtively, in her cheap squirrel muff.

It was night long, long before we came to Court-Culver, the station where we had to get out. Miles, as well as I, had been sitting with eyes shut. Once or twice, peeping through my lashes, I saw his face, pale and almost haggard, in the crude blaze of electricity that poured down from the ceiling. I wondered if he really were asleep; but the alert way in which he sat up before the train arrived at Court-Culver

showed me that he was not. Like me, he had been thinking, and even less happily, judging from his expression, for his dark, straight eyebrows were drawn together in an anxious frown.

Two carriages — no motors, this time — met us at the station. Miles put me into one of these, with a touch not ungentle, yet seemingly unconscious that I was a living being. Miss Timpson bundled herself and my most treasured things into the other carriage.

"We've at least half an hour's drive," said Miles. "I wish you could have arrived by day. The — your new home would have seemed more worth having if your first sight of it had been in sunlight."

"Moonlight is better," I replied with a desperate effort to be cheerful at any price. "And there's moonlight — after all the rain!"

"Yes. So there is. I had n't noticed!" exclaimed Miles. "But on a night like this it gives a cold effect."

Would he not have noticed the moonlight if he had been bringing home *Helène Garde* as his bride, in this flood of silver radiance, and would "the effect" have been cold for him then?

But I must not dwell on such thoughts. They are cruel to both of us.

"I don't mind the cold," I murmured, meekly.

"I'm glad to hear that. Otherwise you might suffer from it here," said Miles. Then he stopped abruptly, conscious, perhaps, as I was, that there might seem to be a hidden meaning in his words.

For a time we did not speak; but just as we were driving between two tall stone pillars, with queer heraldic-looking beasts on top, he spoke again, evidently with an effort.

"I'm afraid Culver is going to strike you as grim and unhomelike," he hurried on. "You're very young, after all — I hardly realized how young, till to-day — and things must be entirely different in your own country; warmer, and more genial — scenery and architecture — people, too. Perhaps you may have had some idea of — of a great welcome for the bride, such as you've read about in books, or seen in pictures; servants turning out, and torches and cheering. There'll be nothing of that sort here. There could n't have been much, in any case, for the staff of servants at Culver is a beggarly one, and has been for years. But — with my brother Laurie so ill, there's a note of — almost of tragedy about the place. More and more I feel I may have wronged you in — in —"

"No, no," I assured him. "The answer is no, though I don't quite understand what you mean."

"I mean — in taking you at your word, and marrying you."

"Oh, please don't feel that!" I begged, ineptly, I felt. "Why — what made you think of it — to-day?"

"I was — watching you once or twice for a minute or two in the train, when you were asleep," he admitted, as if reluctantly. "It was then I realized how young you are. You are hardly more than a child."

"Asleep — in the train!" But I did n't contradict him. I was very busy telling myself that probably he had never really looked at me at all before, and now, only to wonder what he was going to do with this American changeling in his grim old Castle, so unsuited to the newly rich. "I'm quite a woman, I

assure you," I said. "Over twenty-one. And I should n't know what to do if lots of servants curtsayed and waved torches under my nose."

Already his thoughts had moved on.

"I must thank you again for coming directly up here, in spite of the inconveniences," he said. "I did n't speak of it before, because I did n't want you to feel that you were being coerced; but I've had two telegrams from my brother begging me to come back quickly. He's in a very nervous state, poor boy. If—I hardly suppose it will be necessary—but if you do see him—not to-night of course, but to-morrow or some other day, please make as much allowance as you can. He is not himself just now. Suffering has changed him."

"I promise to make every allowance," I answered. "It will be easy. I saw your brother at Lady Meldon's, you remember, before—I mean—when he was well. I'm so sorry for him—so deeply sorry!"

"I don't believe Laurie likes being pitied any better than I do," said Miles.

"Oh, I won't show that I'm sorry!" I hurried to protest.

"I'm sure you'll be tactful," Miles returned, rather stiffly, "if—you meet. But it may be some time first."

This, for some foolish reason, was a surprise. I had been imagining that, for reasons of conventionality, they would think I ought to be taken to Laurie at once, and make his acquaintance as his sister-in-law. But how stupid I was to fancy such a thing!

We drove along a winding avenue, under dark archways of spreading trees. Once we passed a sheet of water, black except where it mirrored a moon

white as a bleached skull. Oh yes, Miles was right. The moon gave a very cold effect on such a night as this! I felt chilled to my soul.

By and by the carriage came out from among trees on to a kind of open plateau, and there the castle loomed up, a huge, irregular black mass, cut out of the silver sky. I was vaguely aware of towers, and a keep like a giant's monument. Miles explained that once there had been a drawbridge, but for the last two centuries it had not been raised. The carriage drove over the back of this old warrior in chains, and we were in a vast courtyard which looked to me at least half an acre square. A door opened, as if at the sound of our carriage-wheels, and a flood of yellow light streamed out. There were other lights, too, which defined the shape of two or three tall, gothic windows, and in the middle of leaded panes were jeweled spots of color: the family crest, in stained glass, that glowed in the darkness like breastplates of rubies, topazes, and emeralds. Up in one of the towers, also, there were lighted windows; small, golden squares, deepset in shadow.

Of course I knew I was coming to live in a castle, but I had n't expected to find it so tremendous, so formidable. I suppose my imagination had not much material to work upon, for I have traveled very little on this side of the world; and at home, when people say, "So-and-So lives in a regular castle," it means only a very big house after all. This enormous structure terrifies me, knowing that in future it will be the only place I shall have a right to call "home." If Miles loved me, and welcomed me to this historic house with his hand warm on mine, I think I could be joyously proud of Culver Castle; but as it is — well,

never mind! I must warm my heart by thinking how quaint it is that Sandy Phayre should live here. I shall be like a small gray mouse, nesting in a castle as big as a stone mountain, and perkily alluding to the great place as "home."

The door by which we entered was low-browed, but the oak looked thick enough to withstand a siege. Inside was a big vestibule, all of stone — floor, walls, and arched roof — and beyond was a hall which could easily hold a dozen pretty little California bungalows. There were lamps, not electric lights; and the shadows fell like semi-transparent gray curtains, through which glimmered here and there the soft colors of faded tapestry, old banners and old portraits. I saw suits of armor like the ghosts of long dead knights; and when Miles spoke to the two servants — a very old butler, and an almost elderly footman — who received us, his voice echoed, as if some one were repeating his words in a whisper over his shoulder.

I am afraid I jumped when that ancient butler (born to buttle, of parents descended from generations of those who have buttled since civilization produced butlers), respectfully addressed me as "Your ladyship."

My gracious, I am a *ladyship* — suddenly, out of a clear sky! How extraordinary! I never thought much about that part of my destiny. There is *one* comfort, Miss Timpson would rather be burnt at the stake than "my lady" me. I shall always have her to fall back upon, when I must feel at home with myself, or burst into tears.

Perhaps I looked rather pale and frightened, and small and foreign, in the historic hall of the Culver family. Anyhow, Miles spoke to me kindly — more

kindly than he has spoken yet, since I did that contemptible, mercenary thing — consent to marry him for his title and position. It was as if he reminded himself: "After all, I suppose the poor little wretch is human; and anyhow, I ought not to forget, even with her, that a Culver must be gentle to women."

"Welcome to your new home," he said. "I hope you may be satisfied, when you come to know what the place is like, and — contented."

"Thank you very much," I replied, like a schoolgirl. But at the moment I really couldn't think of anything better to say.

Just then, there appeared a little old woman, limping slightly. She was dressed in black silk which rustled in a wonderful, old-fashioned way that no silk ever can rustle in, if made nowadays. I'm sure the little old woman must have had her dress — ready to grow up to, when she was born, about seventy-five years ago — handed down to her by her mother. Not that she gave the effect of ever having been born, or of needing a mother. She looked as if she must have come into the world exactly as she was, and could never have been any younger than now. Her highly developed aquiline nose, her deep-drawn wrinkles, her iron-gray hair, the little knot of pink veins on each prominent cheek bone appeared as inseparable from her individuality as the features of a portrait-picture by some old master. Beside her, the butler and the almost elderly footman suddenly appeared quite human. Her eyes, behind gold-rimmed glasses, softened as Miles spoke to her, however, and she apologized for being late. "I was with Mr. Laurence, Sir," she explained, in a voice which had a faint Scottish or north-country "burr."

"He is not worse, I hope?" Miles asked quickly.

"Oh no, Sir," replied the little old woman, whom I took to be the housekeeper. "But he has been a little nervous and excitable; and you know, Sir, even when Mr. Laurence was a tiny boy, if he had any hurt or trouble, I used to be sent for by his nurse."

So speaking, she too became human, and very sweet — a dear, kind old body; but when Miles introduced her to me, saying that she was Mrs. Bagshot, who had been housekeeper at the Castle since he could remember, she hardened again into an icy, remote respectfulness, and deadly respectability. I guessed, somehow, that she and the other old servants (I feel I ought to write "retainers") of the Castle thoroughly disapprove the whole modern race of Americans, and can hardly be reconciled to the necessity of importing vulgar dollars. Even the suits of armor, and the old family portraits whose eyes looked out at me from the walls, as I grew accustomed to the dim light, seemed to disapprove of and resent the intruder.

"I'm sure you would like Mrs. Bagshot to show you and your maid to your rooms," Miles suggested. "There'll be supper for you there, where it's rather warmer and cosier than it can be made downstairs for a tired traveler. I chose the rooms for you which I thought you'd like best, but of course if you prefer anything else, when you've inspected the house, you know it is yours, to do as you please with. Now, if you don't mind, I'll hurry off to Laurie. Our train was late, and I'm afraid he's been getting impatient."

"Will your ladyship kindly come this way?" inquired Mrs. Bagshot.

By this time Miss Timpson had arrived upon the scene, and with a silly sensitiveness I noticed her

sharp look of surprise as Sir Miles and I politely bade each other good-night. I saw her realizing his desire for me to be off, so that without discourtesy he could escape to his brother. With my spirit-ears I heard her spirit snort defiance against the respectable superiority of Mrs. Bagshot.

There are many closed doors of dark oak, leading out of the hall, to rooms which seem to me mysterious. One of these, which the footman opened, admitted us to another hall, not nearly so large as the first, though in an ordinary house it would be considered big. It is wainscoted with beautifully carved oak, and has a great staircase of oak, with wide shallow steps, certainly as old as the days of Queen Bess: though Mrs. Bagshot breathed something about the "oak hall" being comparatively modern. Half way up we came to a platform, where stands the most marvelous grandfather clock I ever saw. It has moons and stars, and a smiling gold face like a sun, and every kind of curious feature a clock was ever blessed with. I had the feeling that it looked at me in a sympathetic way, and I believe we shall be friends, that clock and I, if only I can get on its good side, and persuade it to tick out kindly minutes of contentment! — I dare n't say happiness, for warm, personal happiness is not for the girl Miles Culver has married for his brother's sake.

A gallery runs round the oak hall, with a lovely carved railing, and on the polished floor of this gallery lie old, very old, but still beautiful Persian rugs. Everything has the air of being incredibly old in the Castle. It seems an impertinence to be young, and especially to be American. On the paneled oak walls of the gallery, and the corridor into which we turned, hang portraits of haughty-faced, powdered-haired

Georgian ancestors who perhaps fought against my ancestors (if I had any!) in the war of the American Revolution, and would certainly consider me a base intruder. Some of the poor dears badly need restoring, but I'm sure they'd rather drop in flakes of dry paint off their canvases, than be re-attached to it with my money.

At last Mrs. Bagshot opened a door, and stood back, a stiffly respectful little figure — like a pincushion doll — to let me pass. I saw a kind of ante-room, lit by candles in silver candelabra that branched out from the dark wainscot. There are benches along the wall — old, corkscrew-legged, caned benches of — I think — the Stuart period, for they look like the furniture at Lady Meldon's, all of which is of that time. I could imagine dressmakers, milliners, and hairdressers, or people from London jewelers, sitting on those benches, waiting the pleasure of some beauty of Charles the Second's day; and just as I was sketching this picture in my mind, Mrs. Bagshot announced that the suite of rooms in which she was "conducting your ladyship" were called King Charles's rooms.

"The king visited here after the Restoration," she went on. "He was a great friend of the baronet of that date, also a Sir Miles, that being almost invariably the name of the eldest son, since the time of the legend."

"What legend?" I asked, stopping short in the ante-room, as Mrs. Bagshot opened another door.

"Oh, my lady, only the legend that bad luck comes into the Culver family unless the eldest has that name. The second baronet, in the time of Henry VI., married a foreigner — that is, an Irish young woman, with a great deal of money, which it seems was needed.

The first boy was named for her father, who gave her a great fortune; and the lady, his mother, living to see him marry and have a son of his own, wished the child to receive the name of Miles. The young wife would not listen, for she had no patience with anything foreign, not even Irish, so the baby was called John, after the grandfather. He grew up very wild, and squandered most of the money. His boy was named Miles, because the Irish lady had prophesied that all the luck she brought would go, whenever another name than Miles came in with the eldest son; and true enough, good fortune was brought back by him. He was brave, and won honors, and married well. So it has gone on ever since. Whenever the parents disregarded that old superstition, there's been an unlucky generation, but all the Culver men named Miles have been splendid, and brought honor and luck into their family — down to the present."

As she finished, her voice fell dismally, as if she would have added: "This time is the exception. *Our* Sir Miles has brought plenty of honor, but the family luck is out." I felt guilty, being a foreigner, not only with Irish blood in my veins, but American, which Mrs. Bagshot thinks even less excusable, I'm sure. Perhaps she realized that her tone had conveyed the reverse of a compliment, for she resumed more chattily: "These rooms are the favorites with the ladies who have come here as mistresses of the Castle. They are the most cheerful, with the finest outlook, and in the best repair. Sir Miles's mother occupied them as a bride, my lady, and later a bathroom was made out of what had been a powder-closet. There **are** but two more bathrooms in the Castle, and this is the best."

She ushered me into a lovely great bedroom, with a huge fireplace of carved stone, where logs were blazing merrily. The only merry thing in the house, this fire! The ceiling is wonderful, a miracle in plaster, all adorable cupids and garlands, very white in contrast to the oak wainscoting. There's a great window, with leaded panes in charming patterns, all across one end of the long room. It is in a recess, with a seat cushioned with old Italian damask, faded to a dim rose hue, and on the big four-post bedstead are curtains of the same exquisite stuff. The oak floor, with its wide boards, is bare except for three glorious Persian rugs, shabby with much use; and the biggest chairs are covered with bright new chintz. Not a piece of furniture can be less than a hundred and fifty years old, some of it far older; all beautiful, though not all in perfect repair. Mrs. Bagshot showed Miss Timpson and me the door of the bath — late powder closet — and the door of a small, but enchanting sitting-room, all leaded Tudor windows and carved oak. On the other side I noticed another door, and as the old housekeeper made no mention of it, I ventured to ask where it led.

"Oh, *that*, my lady," she replied with a slight hesitation, "goes into another big bedroom, unused now. Indeed, it has been unused since the death of Sir Miles' father, the late baronet. During many years that was his room. Thinking your ladyship would not care to have an empty suite so near, left open, I have taken the liberty of locking that door. But of course I shall be ready to hand your ladyship the key — and all others."

"Thank you," I said, meekly. "If I should want them for any reason, I will ask."

I saw Miss Timpson glaring at the door in question, as if she would like to box its ears.

I guessed what was in her mind. One learns to read people's thoughts when one has lived with them for years.

She was in a rage, I knew, because she saw her nursling neglected. In her opinion Sir Miles ought to have his quarters behind that door, in the rooms where his father had lived in good old days. Still, I had confidence in her that she would not distress me by blurting out her grievance. And I judged her rightly. When we two were left alone, while my offensively new luggage defiled the stately ante-room, Miss Timpson confined her fury to thrusting food upon me as if each dish had been a dagger.

Supper was laid for me in the sitting-room; and when the candles on the table had been lit by Mrs. Bagshot before departing, nothing could have been cosier in effect. The gate-legged table showed a polished surface of dark oak, through meshes of embroidery and lace. A dozen wax candles in branching silver sticks had crimson silk shades, the only new things in the room except a bunch of red chrysanthemums in a crystal rose-bowl. The china was the most lovely old Spode I ever saw, and the pretty table made a glittering island of white and silver in the oak-walled room. The red candle-shades and the smouldering logs in the huge fire-place gave out a rosy glow in beautiful contrast to the violet pattern of moonlit, leaded panes in the two bow-windows, where I had pushed the damask curtains partly back. It was a picture which lacked only one figure to make it perfect, and because of that lack, the picture might have been named "The Missing Bridegroom."

November 28th, Morning.

Last night was my first night in a four-post bedstead, and I had very special, four-poster sort of dreams. I don't believe one could have ordinary dreams in such a carved sleep-throne for a princess. I saw myself — in the dreams — a quite important personage in the Castle, with Miles — actually Miles — wanting my advice, and the servants looking up to me. I was so happy that it was like a douche of cold water, full in the face, to wake up and remember things as they really are. I had not very long in bed, for I sat up hours on end, writing, after Miss Timpson went to her own room near by; and I got up at eight, as usual; yet I dreamed the most extraordinary number and variety of dreams. Each one was nicer than the other, like reading a volume of fairy-tales; but I think I liked best of all the one where a sweet woman, with bright blue eyes and wonderfully dressed, brown hair, laid her hand on my shoulder and said that I was the "luck of the Culvers, come back after three black generations."

How I wish that dreams did n't go by contraries! But never mind. If four-poster dreams are always of this kind, I shall have something to look forward to at night, no matter what trials may darken the days. I shall "play" that the dream world is just as true as the real world.

This morning, at exactly eight by the watch under my pillow, Miss Timpson appeared. She came softly, against her ordinary habit; but I was awake, and heard the gentle opening of the door.

"I thought you might n't have had much sleep," she snapped, but with a funny, gruff sort of kindness, "so I did n't want to disturb you. I'll go away again

if you like. I don't see that there's much to get up for here, not even to take a walk, for it's raining torrents. It *would* be!"

"Let it, if it likes," said I, more cheerfully than I felt. "I've had lovely dreams, and I'm quite ready to get up."

"You shan't, till you've got a fire. And I'm going to make it myself. I've been up and around, since seven, and from all I can see and hear there ain't but five house servants in this great barrack of a place, as big as a small town."

"It does seem a small garrison for the fort," I admitted, "but you see, Sir Miles and his brother have n't lived here much. They've generally let the Castle of late years, and I suppose the people who took it brought their own servants in swarms. We shall perhaps have swarms, too, by and by, now that the Castle is to be our home, and just at first we must play at picnicing."

"Picnicing! It'll be a gloomy game here," mumbled my old nurse. "Will you have breakfast in your room or downstairs? *That woman* wants to know, and says Sir Miles is breakfasting with his brother."

"What woman?" I asked, hastily, glad to say something to cover a stupid blush, because of the news about Sir Miles. Of course, I might have known he would breakfast with his brother. I suppose he always will.

"I believe she goes by the name of Bagshot," replied Miss Timpson, with bitter emphasis, as if the housekeeper at Culver Castle had no right to be Bagshot, if the whole truth were known.

"Oh! Tell her I should like it in my own sitting-room, please," I said.

"So I will, when I get your fire made, and set your bath to running."

She was quick as a flash about the work, as she is in everything—including her temper. I felt that I ought to have scolded her for the grimly resentful view she openly took of everything and every one at Culver Castle; but though exactly the right words came to my lips—quite proper and dignified—I let them go no farther. "Not yet!" I told myself; for in spite of her reprehensible ways it is a great comfort to see poor old Miss Timpy flying about, doing things for me, in this otherwise lonely vastness. Besides, I know very well that her extra crossness is put on only to hide emotion.

She brought a delicious little breakfast, and stood over me to make sure that I ate it. Afterward, while I was doing my hair (which I never allow her to touch), she selected my dress: a garment which she evidently thought appropriate for the American bride's first day in a border castle of northern England. It was a dress I hate, and in which I would look hideous if I were so misguided as to put it on. Aunt Dora chose it for me. I dared not refuse to have it, as that would have led to discussion, but I made up my mind to forget it. Now, here was the mustard-colored abomination, resurrected by Miss Timpson.

"I won't wear that," I protested. "I want something pretty."

"Pretty! As if it matters whether a thing's pretty or not, in a dungeon without a *human soul* to see you! The dress is warm and comfortable. It was very expensive, and it's suitable."

"I'm glad if you agree with me in thinking Sir Miles rather superhuman," said I. "But I don't

know on what plane you put the butler and footman, not counting Mrs. Bagshot. Besides, I like to look as nice as I can for my own sake."

"It's a good thing you do, since there's no one else to care how you look," grumbled the irrepressible one. "As for Sir Miles, your Mrs. Bagshot has told me that for the present he will in all probability take every one of his meals with his brother."

I looked at her steadily. "I begin to see what is in your mind," I said. "You want to frighten me with the loneliness of this place. You don't wish to stay here, now you've seen it."

"I don't wish to stay here!" she retorted. "You know perfectly well I don't care about myself. But it just makes me boil to see you insulted."

"Wait, before coming to the boiling-point, till I am insulted," I returned. "This is the kind of life I expected to lead. I haven't married for the things most girls marry for. It occurs to me that I'm now Lady Culver. And my conception of the part is a young woman who wears her prettiest dresses every day."

"Well, if anybody but yourself had accused you of such motives I would n't have believed 'em," Miss Timpson muttered. And my heart ached a little. I said what I said with a motive. I wish her to think I am satisfied with everything; yet for the first moment it made me sore to be taken at my word—by *her*, my old nurse, who ought to know me better than any one else does. If she believes the thing so easily, what about others?

Now, in the pretty, nattier blue frock which I fought for and got, I am writing not so much because I want to write, as because I don't know what

else to do with myself. I dare n't go prowling around the Castle, as I should like to do, even at the cost of taking Mrs. Bagshot as a cicerone. She would probably misunderstand, and think me vulgarly curious. Also — far worse — if I met Miles anywhere, it would be embarrassing; and he too would misunderstand.

I should n't mind taking a walk, and in a tweed coat and thick boots would rather enjoy the rain, but I hardly know where to go. I'm afraid that I'm weak enough to be miserable, and already a little discouraged, in spite of my brave promises to Lady Meldon. But you see, Book, it seems hopeless that I shall ever be able to keep any of those promises. She told me I was to be as cheerful and gay as possible, in order to help Miles. How am I to help him, if we are to have no life together, now that I am in his house? I did n't expect to be with him much; yet this beginning is worse than —

I had written as far as that when I was interrupted by a note coming. The faded footman brought it, and it was from Miles, asking that I would allow him to call on a "little matter of business."

I dashed off a line to say "Yes, with pleasure"; and presently he appeared.

I stood up to receive him, and we shook hands formally — at least, he did. But how can a girl be formal, if she is blushing like a bonfire, and her heart is pounding?

"How do you do?" said I.

"How do you do?" said he. And with that I began to laugh nervously, almost to giggle. He stared, so I had to explain; and the best thing, though bad

enough, was to tell the truth. "How silly of me!" I exclaimed, "but I could n't help feeling as if one of us ought to add: 'Doctor Livingstone, I believe?' and the idiocy of the idea made me laugh."

To my horror he flushed, though he smiled, too, and I saw, only too well, that he understood. "Yes, it is rather like meeting in a desert," he said, "and — exchanging commonplaces. But — well, after all, there is n't anything else that we can exchange, is there?"

"Perhaps not yet," I dared to answer.

He frowned slightly. "I am a bear, I know," he returned. "A bear with a sore head — and that means a brutal kind of a brute. But I am what fate has made me. And — I'm afraid I must warn you that I'm likely to get worse, and bite the hand that tries to feed me, if — any effort is made to 'cheer me up,' and lure me out of my hollow tree. I could n't stand that."

"Please don't be afraid of me," I said. "I have no dangerously good intentions. I only meant — if I meant anything — that if we have to talk to each other at all, we may get so accustomed to it that we shall feel quite friendly, and exchange ideas instead of commonplaces."

Probably he thought this flippant. He looked faintly surprised, was silent for an instant, and then said, "The question of our meeting each other in daily life was what I wanted to talk over, in coming to you now. Of course, I realize that the last thing you married me for was to have my society; still — perhaps it's worse here, less tolerable than you expected? I've been rather worrying about this, since last night, in spite of the perfect understanding we

seemed to have arrived at. And I felt as if I should like to see you, simply to say — er — to remind you that your banishment need n't be for long. As soon as you can, without making gossip — which I don't mind much for myself, but do mind for you — I shall send you off to visit your people, or Lady Meldon. Meanwhile — ”

“ Thank you,” said I. “ Please don't worry about me in the least. I don't want to be ‘ sent off,’ unless it makes you restless even to remember that I'm here. You need n't bother about me. Just think, if you think of me at all, that I'm getting along very well.”

“ I should be glad to think that,” he said, “ for I'm selfish enough to hate feeling a brute. I do feel myself a brute to be taking your fortune, and making you a prisoner. But you *did* understand what to expect, did n't you? ”

“ Quite,” I answered. “ Please stop feeling a brute. You have other things to worry about.”

“ God knows I have!” he burst out, then looked vexed with himself. “ Not so many as I had before our — shall I call it ‘ bargain?’ The word is n't nice, yet it seems to absolve me a little, and therefore — again selfishly — I like it.”

“ The word does very well,” I assented.

“ Your money, which you thought it worth while to give for this old house, and — a few other things I had to offer, has largely relieved my anxiety. It will pay for the great man, Doctor von Waldhausen, to come over from Berlin, and do what he can for my brother; and it enables me to keep Laurie here, in the only place he cares for. He feels that, anywhere else, already he would have lost hope. But it's hard

on you, being here, till you can decently get away. That's what I want to discuss. People will call. I can't see them. It may be weak — I suppose it is — but having to play the happy bridegroom before a lot of watching eyes would drive me mad. I've been near madness, sometimes! You'll have to receive callers alone; but luckily, there's the best of excuses, which will prevent cackle. You can say, truly, that most of my time has to be spent with Laurie. And you can return the visits alone, on the same plea. It will relieve the monotony a little. There are some pleasant enough neighbors within twenty miles. They think nothing of distance when they can be kind. But up to now, I have n't let them be kind. If you take a fancy to any one, accept invitations; even ask one or two girls to lunch with you, here in your own den. That's the best programme I can map out for you just at present, except that, when you look over the house, remember you're at liberty to do what you like in the way of improvements and repairs. Only to please yourself, though. Don't spend a penny because you think it may gratify me. I don't care a —— that is, while Laurie's so ill, nothing else seems very important. But you can plan changes, and get more servants, to make things comfortable. Later, have your plans carried out exactly as you wish, though there must be no noise or bustle now, where it can trouble Laurie."

"I should like to see the Castle, if I may," I said.

"If you don't mind."

"Why should I mind?" he asked, rather roughly.

"There's no Bluebeard's Chamber."

"If there were, I should n't steal the key," I answered. "I'm not a Fatima."

"No," said Miles. "Fatima began, I believe, by being in love with Bluebeard."

"I dare say he was attractive," I suggested. "But we're going back to commonplaces, and potted phrases."

"I have finished the business that brought me," — he took up the dropped thread of his intention — "or almost finished. There's only one thing more. As I said, of course you don't care about my society. Why should you? But I am a human being still — more or less — and if you prefer my companionship occasionally to none at all — until you've made a few pleasant acquaintances and are all right — we can dine together, if you like, every evening. It's the one meal I can spare from my brother. What do you say?"

"I say — no," I replied, very reluctantly. If only he had dreamed how tempted I was to grasp the chance of being with him sometimes, even against his will, he would have given me much credit for that decision. "I thank you for considering me," I hurried on, "for after our 'bargain,' as you call it, there's no reason why you should, particularly. But I know you would rather have your own society than mine; and I'm quite good chums with myself, so I shan't be really lonely. Once I've been introduced to the library, and made friends with your books, I shall be happy."

"*Your* books," he amended. "You have bought and paid a very high price for them." I saw that he was relieved by my answer to the suggestion about dining. "Shall I take you down, and introduce you now?"

"If you can spare the time, I should be glad," I agreed.

"With pleasure" — in his most conventional manner. "Soon I must go and have a look at a horse I love — my old charger, who has been taken with pneumonia. I've been out to him once, but I want to have another look, and meet the vet, who has been wired for to come about three. Let's go down at once. I did n't know you were keen on books."

"I am — keen on horses, too," I ventured. "I should so love to see your old charger" — instantly I realized that I had made a mistake. In another second I should have been stupid enough to ask if I might go with him to the stables, instead of being politely bowed into the library, and there left. Quickly I caught myself up, before Miles could be disagreeably sure of my suspected meaning — "when he's better," I said, "if I have your permission to visit him."

"Do please understand that no permission is necessary for you to go anywhere, indoors or out," Miles replied, with stifled impatience, such as one feels with a child, or a person of slow intelligence who must be told the same thing over and over. "The whole place is yours, now, not mine."

My ears tingled, and I held my breath to keep down one of the stupid blushes which bring tears to the eyes. (I read in a magazine once that holding the breath is a good remedy for blushing.)

"If it is mine, I make you a present of it, here and now," said I, with heavy lightness.

Miles looked me very straight and steadily in the eyes, as if I puzzled him, and he were trying to get at the truth of me. It was something to find that he gave, or even lent, me a place in his mind, as an individual!

"You are recklessly generous — or extremely fond

of joking, I don't know which," he remarked. "But if I took you seriously, I should have to refuse the gift; so I prefer to suppose you're joking."

"At least, your horse is yours," I laughed feebly. "I hope you won't dispute that."

"If he is, the stables are yours. It comes to much the same thing."

"It may for you. It does n't for me," I said. "I shall never go near the horse unless you give me permission."

"Very well," returned Miles, again visibly hiding impatience. "I give you formal permission."

Then I burst out, before I stopped to think: "Oh, must everything always be 'formal' between you and me?"

His eyes had been merely cold. Suddenly there was anger, almost horror, in them. I saw that he was afraid I had forgotten the terms on which he had taken me, and feared for his personal freedom. "What do you mean?" he asked abruptly.

"Only that I should like to think we might be friends. And friendship does away with formality," I explained.

"Real friendship is very rare, is n't it?" he said, not unkindly, but remotely. "It takes years to grow, as a rule; and it can exist only between natures fitted to respond one to another."

"Oh! I did n't know that there was any rule for friendship or love," I exclaimed; and then, under his somber gaze, turned my head and the subject at the same time. "You were going to take me down to the library," I reminded him.

"Yes," he said, almost eagerly. "We'll start, if you're ready."

He held open the door for me to walk out, through the ante-room, free of luggage now. Then he showed me the way down, which would have been difficult to find for the first time alone. I had not put my nose outside the door of my own suite since I was led up to it by Mrs. Bagshot last night; and there is a network of corridors.

"Here's the library," Miles announced at last. "It's a nice room, is n't it?"

"Nice" is a very inadequate word to express the glorious room, with its two huge Tudor windows, and its walls peopled with a vast company of kings and queens—all the best books written since the world began to write and preserve its writings. But I notice that Englishmen are shy of strong adjectives.

"You must have the fire lighted if you're going to sit here," he said, looking at the great stone fireplace with its piled unlit logs.

"Thank you, I'll ring," I promised.

Miles laughed. "I'm afraid there are very few bells that ring in the house, and I noticed last time I was here that this is n't one which does. I'll light the fire."

I realized, from his tone, that it would only annoy him and waste time to object, so I watched him in silence as he stooped down, put a match to the kindlings, then another and another. When the paper and small sticks had ignited, he stood up. His face was stained with a dark flush, which faded quickly, leaving it ghastly white.

"Oh, you're ill!" I exclaimed, frightened at his sudden pallor and look of pain.

"No, it's nothing," he said. "Only a headache.

I've been having it a good deal lately. But I'm quite all right, I assure you."

"Have you spoken to a doctor about the headaches?" I asked.

"Good heavens, no. I never bother with doctors — for myself. Please don't think, or speak of this again. It's not worth it. And especially, say nothing to Laurie, if you and he should meet. I don't want him worried."

"Certainly not," I agreed. And in another minute he had left me to browse among the books.

It is well to call a great library a king's garden, but to be happy in the garden, you must be in favor with your own local king, of the Heart Principality. I never saw so many splendid books together, in a private collection, and I wandered dutifully about, making my curtsy to the assembled royalties: but I could not concentrate my mind on their excellencies. It would dart away to Miles, and his headaches. How I wish that, instead of being a figurehead of a wife, I were something *real* to him, a power in his life to comfort and support in time of trouble!

November 30th, Night.

There was nothing new to write yesterday, not even about my feelings, for they seemed to be numb: the effect of being alone (except for Miss Timpson) in this great block of English history carved out of stone. I began to understand the sensations of wrecked mariners, living in caves on desert, sea-swept islands, where nothing can possibly happen. I did not see or hear of Miles and Laurie. No one called — though for that I was glad. I had not courage to take Miles' ad-

vice and plan improvements or repairs. Since he took no interest, and told me to please myself, I took no interest either: though it would not be difficult, I think, to love Culver Castle for itself, and want to do it good.

Well — that was yesterday. Things have happened since. This morning Miles came into the library, where I was steadying my soul with a lovely old volume of Marcus Aurelius.

“Oh,” he said, “your maid thought you would be here. I wanted to see you. A letter has come from Doctor von Waldhausen to say that he can leave Berlin a week from to-day. That means, he will arrive here in less than a fortnight, to examine Laurie, and say whether he thinks there’s any hope from his treatment. Meanwhile, I have been asked to inspect a lot of Territorials at Windsor. I’m left at liberty to refuse if necessary on my brother’s account; but Laurie seems actually to wish me to go. I can’t understand his attitude. It does n’t appear to be entirely unselfish, and yet — ”

He paused, having evidently been talking more to himself than to me for the last two sentences. “Anyhow,” he went on, “I shall go, since Laurie is suffering no worse than usual, and there’s not likely — according to the local doctor and the two nurses — to be any sudden change. I shall go, and be away nearly a week. The question is, would you care to pack up in a hurry and start off with me, to stop in London with Lady Meldon — or with your own people?”

I reflected for an instant, and then, thanking him, replied that I would stay where I was.

“You might enjoy a few days’ shopping and gayety

in town — theaters and so on," he argued. "It must be simply deadly for you here."

"I'm not yearning for shops or theaters," said I. "And I can get acquainted with the Castle and the country round. The weather seems more settled now, and I shall make exploring expeditions."

"If you rode, it would be something for you to do. But I suppose —"

"Of course, I ride!" I could n't help breaking in. "Why, all true-born daughters of California do!"

"Really?" said Miles. "I thought American girls seldom rode."

"I don't believe you know much about American girls."

"I don't," he admitted, frankly. "If you ride, you ought to have a couple of horses of your own. There's room enough, heaven knows, and money enough now you've come to the rescue of the poor old place."

"Perhaps you'll choose me a horse or two when you have time."

"Certainly," he consented, his mind already far away, having soothed his sensitive conscience by trying to provide for my pleasure.

"When shall you go?" I asked.

"To-day, for there's also some business to attend to in London. I shall be back at the end of the week."

I longed to ask him about the headache, but dared not, since he had requested me never to mention it again. I thought he looked paler than before, and his eyes were heavy. It is sad to see the paleness of a man whose face has been bronzed by hot eastern suns. There is something more tragic and fatal about it than the paleness of a man whose skin is white.

I inquired what time the train would leave, and

learned that it went at three. He would lunch early with Laurie, and this was good-bye. We shook hands with each other; and just as he was at the door, I could n't resist saying, "Please take care of yourself."

He looked surprised, almost resentful, and answered, shortly, "Oh, yes, thank you."

I could n't go on absorbing ideas from my old friend Marcus, so very soon I bade him *au revoir*, and hurried like a hunted mouse back to my own quarters. There, in my nest, I nibbled my cheese; and at three o'clock I knew that Miles had gone: that for five or six days there was no faintest hope of seeing him. Still, I was glad that I had refused his offer of going to London. I knew it was a relief to him not to be bothered with me on the journey. And he would enjoy calling on Lady Meldon if I were not there. Even if I had wished, I could not have joined Aunt Dora and Marguerite, for they went to visit a married sister of Lord Burne's, the day after my wedding.

I had begun to write a letter to Lady Meldon — put off from day to day — when, to my great surprise, came a message from Laurie, requesting to see me. Miles had seemed so sure his brother would not care to have my society thrust upon him, that I had given up the expectation of a meeting for the present. It did seem odd that Laurie should choose the moment of Miles' departure to summon me, but I told myself it might be a coincidence.

Mrs. Bagshot brought me the invitation by word of mouth, and said that she would conduct my ladyship to Mr. Laurence's room. We started together, at once, and she took me to the square tower where I had seen lights on the night of our arrival. The stairway is built into the thickness of the wall, and as you go

up, you peep into a narrow corridor that opens into the rooms on each floor. It is a big tower, with space on each story for two large rooms, or three or four little ones. We stopped climbing up stairs at the first story of the tower, which is older than the rest of the existing house, and can be entirely separated from it by thick doors on the ground floor.

As Mrs. Bagshot led me along a very narrow passage, we passed a door which stood ajar. Involuntarily I paused. "Do we go in here?" I asked.

"No, my lady," said the housekeeper. "This is the room Sir Miles is using at present, to be near Mr. Laurence. We have to go to the next door, farther on. There are four rooms on this floor, not counting the bath: two are Mr. Laurence's, his night nurse has one, and the fourth, which is the smallest and worst, is Sir Miles's. He never was one to care for himself and his own comfort — now less than ever. And his quarters here is more like a prison-cell than a nobleman's bedroom, begging your ladyship's pardon."

"Sir Miles is before all a soldier. I suppose that accounts for it," I reflected aloud; and I distinctly heard Mrs. Bagshot sniff. It was a polite, almost inaudible, sniff, but I regarded it as a protest against the liberty I took in having any opinion concerning Sir Miles' characteristics.

By this time the little old housekeeper was knocking at the door farther on. Almost instantly it was opened by a middle-aged woman in the dress of a hospital nurse.

"Lady Culver?" she said, in the soft pleasant voice of an educated person. "Will you come in, please?"

I came in, Mrs. Bagshot retiring, and found myself in a good-sized sitting-room, beautifully furnished,

with interesting pictures on the oak-paneled walls, and several new book-cases, filled with books that looked like modern novels and volumes of poetry or essays. I guessed that the prettiest things in the Castle had been imported to this room, and that the book-cases had been brought to hold literature for the invalid. All the draperies — curtains, and deeply flounced cushions for the wide window-seat — were also new; and there was a huge modern Chesterfield sofa, rather out of keeping with the dignified old furniture, but particularly comfortable. On this, not far from the fireplace and facing the door, reclined Laurie Culver, propped up by a pile of embroidered or brocaded cushions, of rich colors. He had on a dressing-jacket and loose trousers of dark blue, over a shirt with a turned-down collar, which made him look more than ever like pictures of Byron. Over his feet lay a tiger skin, which suited him, somehow. He had not changed as much as I expected — at least, so I thought at first glance, but as his eyes met mine, I saw that youth had died out of them. Also, I saw something else — I saw that he *hated me*. “Why — why?” I asked myself, wildly. Then, quickly the answer came, with a shock that stopped my heart for an instant. “He *knows*.”

If I could have obeyed my impulse, I would have turned and rushed out of the room, so dreadful to me was the look in his eyes. Instead, I stood quite still, waiting. The words I had meant to speak, died unspoken. I felt a sense of danger, not physical, but spiritual, so cold was the atmosphere of enmity.

“I sent to ask you to come here,” he said, when he realized that I did not intend to speak first.

“Yes, I came at once,” was all I could find to answer.

The nurse, a comfortable, commonplace sort of

woman, perhaps not very observant of anything less important than symptoms, must have seen that our greeting was not demonstrative. Maybe she thought us shy of each other, and tried to put us both at ease. "Take this chair, won't you, Lady Culver?" she said, drawing one up near the sofa. "You and Mr. Culver can talk to each other nicely if you sit there, and you won't be too near the fire, which is far too hot for most people, but our invalid likes it."

"Invalid! loathsome word. Please don't call me that," Laurie exclaimed, in a voice trembling with irritation or nervousness. "I may be the beastly thing, but I don't want to hear it."

The nurse did not attempt to defend herself, or even to apologize. Probably she had learned through hard experience with this trying case, that when in doubt, silence was a useful trump to play.

I sat down in the easy-chair, which had been pulled into a place where Laurie and I could face one another without turning our heads.

"Perhaps I might go out while Lady Culver is with you?" the nurse suggested, quietly.

"Good heavens, yes!" exclaimed her patient, clenching and unclenching a thin white hand which, when last I saw it, had been muscular and brown. His voice was curiously like Sir Miles', yet unlike. Once I had thought them quite different in tone, but mental suffering in one and physical suffering in the other had brought out a lurking resemblance.

Miles, if driven to impatience, would, I felt sure, have repented and apologized, but not so Laurie. He watched the nurse making some little preparations before going, watched with the fierce eyes of a dog chained in his kennel, who longs to spring, and bite.

"The night nurse sleeps upstairs," she explained to me. "This room adjoining is Mr. Culver's bedroom, and mine is beyond that, if I should be wanted —"

"You won't be; and if you are, I've got sense enough left to tell her where to go," Laurie broke in, savagely. No wonder Miles had asked me, if I saw him, to "make as much allowance as I could."

Without another word, and only an apologetic raising of the eyebrows to me, the unfortunate woman slipped out of the room. All that was human in her must have longed to bang the door, but instead she shut it with almost exasperating softness. Suddenly I understood something of the effect she had on Laurie Culver's broken nerves.

Whether or not my comprehension showed in my face I can't tell, but as the door closed finally, Laurie said, "What are you thinking about?"

"Nothing — that I could put into words," I answered, doubtfully. My heart was beating very fast.

"You are thinking that I'm a brute."

"No," I said. "I was — vaguely — thinking that you and your nurse have both got on each other's nerves."

"She has n't any, or I should have reduced her to nervous prostration weeks ago. I wish I could! I can't stand her purry ways!"

"Do you like your night nurse any better?" I ventured, partly for the sake of something to say.

"My God, no! She's a prison-warder. But I did n't ask you to come here and listen to me grumbling about my nurses. I want to come to an understanding with you."

"An understanding?" I echoed.

"Yes. You're perfectly well aware of what I mean. For heaven's sake, don't let's beat about the bush. Do you suppose I don't know how and why you got Miles to marry you?"

His tone was so brutal that, in spite of Miles' warning, in spite of myself, I was suddenly hot with anger. "What do you mean?" I asked, haughtily.

"Do you want me to put it into words?"

"Yes," I said.

"Very well, then, I will. I think I shall enjoy doing it, since I have your permission — if I can enjoy anything; because — I hate you. It will be a pleasure to make you suffer. Not that I believe I can; for you must be as hard as nails to have done what you have done. You struck us both — on our open wounds. In mine you have rubbed salt and red pepper. You can't expect me to be gentle with you. There! now you know what I think. Of course you can get up and go, if you choose. I'm helpless. I can't keep you here. And I can't force you to come back."

"No," I said, my voice trembling a little, though I tried to make it calm. "You can't keep me. Yet I shall stay, of my own accord. You have told me what you think, but you haven't told me why you think it."

"You know, well enough."

"I may be mistaken. It will be better for you to put your reason clearly into words."

"I can put it into three. You are a blackmailer!"

I think I must have turned deadly white, for I felt as if my blood rushed away from my head to my heart. I was rather faint, too, but I pulled myself together.

"I always supposed," I said, "that a blackmailer was a person who used knowledge as a weapon, to



"I THINK I SHALL ENJOY DOING IT, BECAUSE -I HATE YOU !!"—Page 140

hold over the heads of those it concerned, and who wished to keep it secret, the blackmailer extorting some advantage from threatening to betray it. But I must be mistaken, for that sort of thing has nothing to do with this case."

"It has everything to do with it!" exclaimed Laurie. "You threatened Miles with something you knew about one he loved; and rather than have her memory blackened, he consented to this mockery of a marriage that makes you Lady Culver, and gives you Culver Castle for your home. I have heard of ambitious, unscrupulous American women, but I never heard of one as bad as you. And you need n't hope that by trembling or turning pale, or trying to look young and childish, you can make me pity you, because you can't. What I want to know is, what did you tell Miles? Did you mention my name, or did you say only that you had proofs of Helène's caring for some one else, whom she had no right to love?"

Some strange spirit, waking within me, made me ask, "Which do you think I did?"

"I hardly know what to think," he answered, his eyes, steadily fixed on my face, dark and dilated with his hate of me. "At first, when Miles said he was going to marry you, I had no doubt that he knew everything *you* knew — not much, really; but you might so easily have exaggerated and made it appear more — made it appear everything vile and untrue. It was one night that he told me — the night he came back from a short trip to London — just after you'd caught him in your trap. The instant he'd broken the news, I jumped to the one conclusion, the one explanation of such a marriage. He looked like death. His eyes avoided mine. I thought you had told him

what you saw when you passed us in the motor-car — and had made up a lot of lies beside. For a minute I expected him to go on, and repeat what you said of us. I made up my mind to blow my brains out. I keep a revolver handy — though nobody knows, and I'm not afraid of your giving me away, for you'd be jolly glad if I used it on myself. Then I realized that he was going to hold back his reason for marrying you. Still, I thought he knew about me — and *her*. I supposed he had enough of the old love left — or pity — to keep his knowledge to himself, and for a few days, believing there was that barrier between us, I suffered tortures. Oh, God, I suffered the tortures of a double hell, as if *one* had n't been enough — the hell that's got my body! Then, as time went on, and he was gentle and loving, as before — almost more than before, I began to think perhaps you had n't dared tell him all: that you'd been afraid of defeating your own object if you said too much. For if Miles knew that you had such a secret concerning me, would he have brought you to live in the house where I am? All night long, every night, I go over and over these questions in my mind. The nights are awful. I hardly sleep — only doze — though I drop off by day sometimes, when the world is n't so black and lonely, full of crowding devils. I made up my mind that when you came, and I got a chance, I'd have it out with you. That's why I wanted Miles to go to Windsor, and inspect the Territorials. He might have suspected something, and interrupted us, if I'd sent for you when he was here. No one else would dare. Now answer me. If you lie, I shall know by your eyes. This damned illness of mine has given me a supersense, I think."

I threw up my head and looked him full in the face.

"You may read my soul if you can," I said. "*I told your brother nothing!*"

"You've got a front of brass," he muttered, when he had stared at me in astonished silence for an instant. "You're cleverer — and more dangerous — than I expected. You look as if you were speaking the truth. But you can't be. You're lying. You must have told Miles something about *Helène* and me — or about her alone — else, for God's sake, why should he marry you?"

I thought quickly, with a strange violence, as if each thought were a separate hammer tapping in my head. Then I said: "If your brother had wished you to know the reason, he would have given it to you himself. What should I deserve if I came in his absence, and told you things which he thought wiser for your sake, or his — or both — not to tell?"

Laurie shrugged his shoulders, and the jerky nervousness of the movement made it seem more than ever dreadful to think that below his waist he was a dead man. A sudden memory of an Arabian Night's tale flashed into my mind — terribly, not frivolously, the tale of the agonized Sultan fixed forever to his throne, because from the waist to the feet he had been turned into black marble.

"What you 'deserve'!" my enemy echoed, with bitter scorn. "Just as well not to go into the question of your deserts. Do you expect me to believe that after worshiping such a woman as *Helène Garde*, Miles would fall in love with a girl like you — just an ordinary girl, to say the best of you — a girl without family, or beauty, or talent, or anything in particular, and marry you for the motives that other men have when they marry?"

It was all I could do, under the lash, not to cry out in defense of Miles and myself, that it was for *his* — Laurie's sake — we had made the bargain he misunderstood. But Miles had asked patience from me for his brother. He had evidently dreaded our meeting, lest Laurie should exasperate me to anger, and in a temper I should do the wretched sufferer harm. Miles must have been aware — I realized now — that Laurie detested the idea of our marriage, and he had preferred to be misunderstood and blamed, rather than give Laurie the intolerable pain of knowing that the great sacrifice was all for his sake. Perhaps Miles had feared the truth might kill the helpless, unhappy invalid. I strengthened myself to the resolution that I would bear anything, now and for all time to come, rather than hurt the brother Miles loved better than himself. Still, it was red-hot iron searing his flesh for Laurie to believe that I had "blackmailed" Miles into marrying me, to save dead Helène's memory. I must, for his sake — therefore indirectly for Miles' sake — undeceive Laurie about this, somehow, without letting him suspect the rather sordid truth. As I sat there, with those eyes of distrust and hate upon me, I prayed very hard to God for help — help now, this *very* now!

"I will tell you something," I said, after that little pause, in which I felt the help coming, strengthening me and showing me what to do. "Lady Meldon loves your brother dearly, and is fond of you too. Maybe she even likes me a little, though you will think that strange. She has great influence on Sir Miles. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes," said Laurie. "What of it?"

"She thought it would be best for you both to have

a woman about the house where you live. She was — almost afraid for Miles: perhaps for you, too. She wanted a woman near, who would take a real interest, and try to do the best she could for you both in your trouble. She had enough confidence in me, though I am not very old or wise, to think I might be such a woman. She persuaded Sir Miles to give me a trial. If I fail completely, by and by, when he is better, and you are stronger, he can send me away — not making any scandal. I could go to America for a long visit, and then something could prevent my coming back to England. After a while everybody would forget about me.”

I spoke quietly and slowly. As I went on, Laurie's face changed. It did not become more friendly, but it looked puzzled.

“By Jove!” he exclaimed. “It would have been hard work, even for Lady Meldon, to persuade Miles that we should be happier with a strange girl in the house with us, an American with whom neither of us could possibly have anything in common. If it had been some old friend of whom we were fond, there might — from a sentimental, far-fetched point of view — have been something in it. But *you* — why, neither of us, not even Miles, had seen you more than three or four times at most.”

“That's true,” I admitted. “But Lady Meldon had seen me a good many times. She knew I was interested in — in you both, and would be glad to do anything I could — not that I could do much. She had confidence in me. And it is the truth that she persuaded Sir Miles to think it would be well for him to bring me here. Of course, I know he is not in love with me, and never can be. I don't expect that. But

I mean to do what I can to be a good wife to him, so far as he will let me. And I should like to be friends with you, too, if possible. Perhaps it would be possible, if you could once believe what I swear to you is the truth: I said nothing to Sir Miles, or Lady Meldon, or any other human being, of what I saw by accident that night in the motor-car. I have not breathed to any one the slightest suspicion I may have had about you and — Comtesse Hélène Garde. I mean to keep the secret always. If I can, I will forget it."

Laurie was staring at me very hard. "You're trying to make yourself out a sort of misunderstood angel, are n't you?" he said. "But you're only succeeding, as far as I'm concerned, in getting me to think you're a first-class little hypocrite. If it's true that you have n't told Miles anything — and I confess you've got me half to believe as much as that — you certainly have *some* deep game to play, and you've played it damned well, or you would n't be here — Miles's wife. I can guess what the game is. You wanted to be Lady Culver. Miles is one of the most distinguished men in England, and if he does n't let me drag him down, he may go farther than he's gone yet, taking you with him. All that's as plain as the nose on my face."

"Say as plain as the nose on my face, if you like," I remarked, when he paused. "I know quite well that it's much plainer than yours. Yours is due to ancestors. I had none who matter, so far as I know — behind my father, of whom I'm very proud."

"Your ancestors, not even your father, matter not at all to me — nor your nose either," said Laurie, spitefully.

That curious imp in me that laughs inopportunately

— and will on my death-bed, according to Timpy — laughed then. And whether my laugh were contagious or not, Laurie suddenly grinned, apparently much to his own surprise.

“Whatever else you are, you’re a very strange girl,” he mumbled. “I can’t make you out.”

“That does n’t matter any more than my nose or my ancestors,” said I, “since I’m of no importance to you; if only you can ease your mind by believing that I have left Sir Miles to worship the unspoiled memory of his love — and to respect his brother. If I had selfish motives in marrying him, at least I did n’t force him to accept me because of blackmail. Ask him yourself if it was n’t Lady Meldon’s influence that made him think it wise to take a wife. He will say yes, and you’ll believe him. I’m sure he never stooped to an untruth in his life, no matter how tempted. As to me, whatever I may be, my ‘game,’ as you call it, is to harm no one. Will you accept my word for that, until you actually see something to make you doubt me?”

“If I do,” Laurie answered, hesitating and reluctant, “it’s not because you’ve gulled me, but because I can read human nature — now I’ve been keyed up to a higher intelligence by suffering. I should know if you were lying.”

“Let it pass at that,” I agreed. “Now, I’m afraid I’ve tired you a good deal. You’ve ‘had it out with me,’ as you said. Shall I call your nurse and go?”

“You can go, but don’t call Sister Sturgis. I want to be alone for a while.”

I got up, and so doing, found that I was trembling all over. I could hardly stand. But I braced myself to strength, with all my courage; and I think Laurie

did not see how silly and weak I was. If he had seen, it might have spoiled everything — if I had really accomplished anything to spoil. When I was sure of my own strength, I walked to the door, without a word. It would have been ridiculous, after what had passed between us, to gabble a conventional “good-bye.”

Just as I was going out, Laurie spoke. “Wait a minute,” he said, abruptly. I looked round, my hand on the door.

“I called you a blackmailer,” he began, and waited as if for me to speak. But I was silent, and in a second or two, he went on: “I don’t know whether I did you an injustice or not. But I’m willing to give you the benefit of the doubt — for a while.”

“Yes?” I said.

He looked haughty and surprised, as if I were a servant who had made an unexpectedly impertinent remark. And I’m not sure there was n’t an undertone of impertinence in my mind. It was a small revenge that I thought I might give myself without hurting him. Indeed, it seemed to me that it might do him good to be shaken up with some emotion not tragic.

“Is that all you have to say?” he inquired.

“What did you expect? Did you suppose I would thank you?”

He broke out into a wild laugh. “I’ll be damned!” he said.

“I’m sure,” I remarked, “that swearing, anyhow before women, is n’t a family habit of the Culvers.”

He stared, sulkily. “Much you know about us! But if your aim is to make me apologize for — *anything*, I’m not going to do it. If I’m not obliged to

hate you as a blackmailer, that won't prevent me from despising you as a tricky little hypocrite."

"At least, it won't be as weakening to the health to despise as to hate," I returned, "so I prefer to have you despise me. For your brother's sake, I'm anxious that you should be strong, and get well as soon as possible."

"For my brother's sake?" he repeated. "Why should you care? You've accomplished your ambition in being Lady Culver, of Culver Castle, instead of Miss Phayre of nowhere in particular — in America. We can dree our own weird in future, I should think, for all you will care."

"As it happens, we share the same 'weird' now," said I. "Not that I know what it means, but if you have finished all you want to say to me, I will go and look up the word in a dictionary." As I spoke, I opened the door.

"Stop!" he said.

I stopped.

"I have n't quite finished. When I called you a blackmailer you might have called me a coward. You looked as if you wanted to. And I was a coward. For I waited till Miles's back was turned before hitting you. And I knew you could n't hit back. I am — a little sorry I used that word."

"Now I *do* thank you!" I exclaimed. "And I see some family resemblance between you and your brother, which I never noticed before."

With that — not giving him a chance to answer — I went out, and shut the door. Running upstairs to a room which I thought must be Sister Sturgis's, I knocked and told her I was going, but that for a few minutes Mr. Culver wished to be left alone.

December 4th.

I have been too busy to talk to my breviary.

Laurie has sent for me every morning since I wrote last, and knowing that his brother would wish me to go to him, if I were wanted, I have gritted my teeth and told myself: "It's for Miles — it's for Miles."

He is like an inquisitor — not Miles; Laurie. Miles would not torture any woman, no matter how much she deserved it — nor any man either, I'm sure. True soldiers, not born but made, are merciful by nature, and chivalrous. But Laurie delights in torturing me. I wonder why he wants me to be with him, since he likes me no better than at first? I do think he acquits me now of blackmailing, but he still believes me a hypocrite, and has an idea that I am playing some deep, mysterious "game."

I suppose he hopes that, if he has me under his eyes continually, he may surprise my secret, and "find me out." Besides, as I said, he loves to torture me.

By this time he must know that beyond chaffing a little, and giving him what children call "tit for tat," I will not retaliate. But I do wonder what theory he has formed to account for my obeying his summons? He could n't force me to come to him, except of my own accord. And as he does n't know how I care for Miles, he can't even suspect that the mouse trots into the trap to please its absent trainer. Do mice ever have trainers, by the way? I suppose tame ones do: and I am rapidly becoming a very tame, well-drilled mouse.

Sometimes Laurie contrives to kill two birds with one stone — to change my simile from mouse to bird. For I am one of the two birds to be killed: poor Sister Sturgis is the other, and the stone is Mr.

Laurence Culver's talent for torturing. It seems that Sister Sturgis prides herself on being able to read aloud charmingly. When she is in the room, Laurie asks *me* to read. When she is out, it would drive him mad to hear any author, good or bad, murdered by my schoolgirl attempts at elocution.

Yesterday he asked, bluntly: "Why do you come when I send for you?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "There happens to be nothing more interesting to do in Culver Castle."

"Well, if you don't like it, your blood's on your own head," Laurie retorted.

"What a pity my blood is n't blue," said I. "It would be quite becoming to me."

"If I did n't know you were the most frivolous creature alive, I should think you rather plucky," he remarked.

"Frivolity is like a padding of air-cushions," I returned. "It saves a good many hard knocks."

"Yours saves you from boring me much, anyhow," he grumbled. "If you were a patient Griselda, I should have wanted to plunge you into boiling oil."

"Exactly what you have done, constantly," I said. "You keep your cauldron always handy, and your oil hot."

"Why do you come here and let me dip you into it, then? You know I am tied by the leg, and can't run after you, to haul you out of your lair."

"I told you why; because the spider's parlor lures the bored fly. I know this is the spider's parlor, but there are no flies and no spiders anywhere else."

"You are the rummiest human being I ever saw," pronounced Laurie.

"Perhaps all Americans seem rum to you English people," said I.

And I was very, very sorry for him, though for a whole hour he had been torturing me by describing his brother's love for Helène Garde. He must have known by sheer instinct that he was safe from serious revenge — that I could not turn and rend him for his treachery to Miles. Miles is coming back, and day after to-morrow the great German doctor will arrive to pronounce, once for all, on Laurie as a "case." If he says that nothing can be done, hope is at an end. There is nothing more to look forward to. I know well that, though Laurie has never mentioned the subject to me, or to Sister Sturgis, he must be thinking of it, at this very minute, and all minutes. I can imagine a little of what the suspense must be to him, for — strangely, it seems to me — apparently he wants to get well. It strikes me that, if I were in his place, I should pray to die. For he must have had a wild passion for Helène Garde, or he would not have tried to take her from Miles, to whom he owes everything, and whom he certainly loves. The thought that he was the cause of Helène's death, in the glory of her youth and beauty, must be anguish to him. If she had not planned to run away with Laurie she would be alive now, and Miles's wife. Besides, loving and looking up to Miles as he really does, in spite of his selfishness, Laurie's heart must be torn with remorse because he was a traitor. He can feel. I know that; without doubt, because of what he told me the first day: how he could not sleep at night for fearing that Miles might *know*. That could n't have been mere

mental cowardice; for surely no Culver could be a coward, and Miles brought Laurie up. Miles's example was always before his eyes.

Yes, if I were in Laurie's place, my one longing would be to die, and atone as best I could, by a brave death, for the harm I had done on earth. But many things he has said prove that Laurie yearns to feel the joy of life again. It is strange—very strange. But I suppose a girl can't judge a man.

My existence in this old castle, so vast, so empty a place save for its ghostly memories and echoes, is like a confused dream, from which I half expect to wake up at any minute, and find myself Sandy Phayre again, back in the Savoy Hotel in London, or even in San Francisco. The queerest part of the dream is going to Laurie's room—going in spite of my dread of him; in spite of himself. For I feel, somehow, as if each day he sent for me in spite of himself. Is it that he wants to tell me something, and means each time to speak, but his courage fails, or he changes his mind—or I change his mood? There is often a look in his eyes, wistful and anxious, under the glitter of defiance always there for me, which gives the impression of intense longing suppressed.

December 5th.

Miles has returned. Politely, he came to my sitting-room, to pay me a formal call, about two hours after returning. Up to that moment, I suppose he was with his brother.

I was sitting near the fire, reading, when he appeared. It was just going to be tea-time. Miss Timpson had arranged the tea things for me, as she

always does here, because — though I have not said so — she thinks it gives me an unhomelike feeling to see the stoney-faced Edward holding the tray, as if it were a remote and dreaded contingency. In his haughty hand, it certainly does become a “tea-equipage,” not a mere tea-tray, and he “bears” rather than “brings” it to me. Simple words don’t suit the stately Edward, neither do simple American girls like me. He would have approved of the Comtesse Helène Garde as the mistress of Culver Castle, would Edward! Consequently, it goes without saying that in his eyes I am a melancholy mistake, a mistake which preys on him day by day. Tea and muffins, reluctantly fetched by his hands, did give me a kind of mental indigestion for a day or two; therefore, I am secretly relieved at getting my nourishment from Miss Timpy instead.

There I was, then, in front of a heavenly fire, about to have a real nursery tea, such as Miss Timpson used to provide long ago, when I was convalescing from measles or mumps, or something else childish and horrid, and had to be indulged.

Toasted muffins were in a covered silver dish on a hob not far from the heap of blazing logs. The traveling silver tea-kettle which we brought over from San Francisco was singing softly, with a cosy, bubbly sound. The tea — Orange Pekoe, also brought from California, in some mysterious receptacles of Miss T.’s — was already in the well-heated tea-pot, and perfuming the warm air. There was a faint fragrance of strawberry jam — a lovely smell — and my old nurse was bustling importantly about, until the critical instant when a gush of steam from the kettle should say “Now!”

She had been looking quite California-like, and happy, till the appearance of Sir Miles. Then she froze, just as Edward, the lone footman, freezes at sight of me. Only she freezes more spitefully than he does. He hardens into a statue. She congeals into a china cat.

"Shall I go now, or pour the water on the leaves first?" she inquired, in a tone suggesting a phonograph.

(Although she continues to call me "Sandy" when we're alone — as she has for the twenty-one years of our life together — she will not demean me at Culver Castle by doing so before folk. Nor will she demean herself by giving me a "ladyship.")

"Oh, I'll finish making tea, thank you," said I; and Miss Timpson vanished like a barometer woman at the approach of bad weather.

Miles and I greeted each other politely. "Would you — have you time to sit down?" I ventured, doubtfully.

"Thank you, I will, if you don't mind," he said, "but —"

"I was just going to have tea. Will you have some? Or, have you had tea already, with — your brother?"

"No. He hates tea, and never drinks it. I rather like it myself. But it did n't occur to me that it was tea-time, when I was with him. It's very good of you to say you'll give me a cup. I'm rather tired. Perhaps tea will do me good. It smells very nice, and — you look wonderfully cosy here. I did n't know this room could be so charming."

I *was* delighted to hear him say this! Of course it was all very formal; but, as he reminded me the other day, what else is there to expect? And he

had the air, I thought, of particularly wanting to please me.

"I'm glad you think it looks nice here," I answered. "This is such a perfectly beautiful old room, I was half afraid to scatter my own belongings around, for fear of spoiling it. Yet, it was just a little bare, without any personal sort of touch; and besides, I like my things that remind me of home."

"You were quite right to put them about," said Miles, his eyes wandering over my water-color sketches, framed photographs, embroideries and bits of old brocade, my pet books in pretty bindings, my queer jade and ivory treasures imported from China-town, the sofa-cushions from my dear San Francisco sitting-room, and the bowls of Eastern silver, filled with autumn flowers.

"I should think no room at Culver has ever looked like this for many years — not since my mother died," he went on. "That was when Laurie was a little boy. I've tried to do what I could to make his quarters comfortable, yet I see now, by contrast, how they need a woman's touch. But it was about Laurie I came to speak. I've heard that — you've been to see him — several times."

"Yes. He sent for me," I hurried to explain, lest Miles should fancy I had taken advantage of his absence to be pushing or curious. And curiosity is the most misunderstood of all the virtues.

"I know. I want to thank you for going to him — for giving him so much of your time. I'm afraid — you found him rather a trying companion?"

"It would be extraordinary if he weren't very nervous," I said. "Do you — take sugar in your tea, and cream?"

"Cream, but no sugar, thanks."

"And will you have a muffin? They're beautifully toasted. Just like they used to be when one was a small child."

Miles laughed. "I've forgotten the muffins of my childhood, if there were any. Your memory has n't far to go back. No, I won't have one, thank you."

"Are n't you hungry, after your journey?"

"The time when I was hungry is almost as hard to remember as the muffins of my childhood."

"I'm sorry," I said. I longed to speak about the headaches, and his health in general. He looked very ill. I was sure he had not been taking care of himself. Probably he had done all he could to wear himself out. The thought flashed through my head that he wished to last only long enough to see Laurie through.

"Don't let my not eating prevent you from doing so, or I shall be sorry I came," he remarked.

I took a muffin, and pretended to eat, but I could not. The least crumb seemed to choke me, with that thought in my mind: that Miles was very ill, and tired of life, longing to get out of the world, and designing to stop in it only for his brother's sake.

"What else have you been doing since I went away?" He was trying conscientiously to show a polite interest in my affairs. I could fancy his saying to himself, "After all, she's done no harm according to her lights."

"Oh, a few people have been to call."

"Have they? Who?"

"Lady Morell. Such an amusing woman."

"Amusing? I never heard that of her before."

"Did n't you? How thoughtless of people! I was simply enchanted with her mental struggles, torn between a yearning to boast of her friendship with

Dickens and a firm resolve to be young. She has a clever trick of measuring each smile; just so far it may go, and no farther, for fear of a wrinkle."

He laughed. It was what I wanted to make him do. The reward of cattism!

"Who else has been?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Portellion."

"Did they amuse you, too?"

"They interested me. Mr. Portellion sits exactly like a mediæval monk. I can't describe it in any other way: fat, and round, as if he were slowly digesting a very large globe of the world; and when he talked of heraldry — I suppose a pet subject — his eyes sparkled over the colors of the words, just as though he were pouring quantities of unset jewels through his fingers. Mrs. Portellion, as far as I could judge in a three-cups-of-tea and two-slices-of-cake visit, has learned nearly everything in the world, and never perceived anything. She told me she'd all Marie Corelli's books in the first editions on a shelf of their own. They were n't even heirlooms, so she has only herself to blame. If you differ from her in any argument, you can see she thinks you're sinfully obstinate, past praying for."

"That's true," said Miles, faintly amused — and even that was a score for me! "A good many people are afraid of Mrs. Portellion."

"I ought to have been. I know she wanted me to be impressed, but I suppose we Americans are bump-tious. I pitied her, because she can't be really good chums with herself. To be Mrs. Portellion must be like living in a lonely, tasteless house with a dull companion — for our bodies are our houses, are n't they? And so lonely if we are n't chums with ourselves."

"What if we once have been chums with ourselves, and then fall out?"

"Oh, we must make it up, and be friends again. It would be living death not to do that."

"You're right. A living death! But if it were impossible to get in touch with the old self?"

"It would n't be impossible — it *could n't*, for a *real* person — who's drunk the elixir."

"What elixir?" I began to hope that my poor little efforts to catch his interest were succeeding for the moment.

"The elixir of youth, which makes *real* people take an ever-renewed interest in life and people, and the beauty of the world."

"According to you, then, I'm not a real person?" Miles said. "I no longer take the slightest interest in life, or people. And the beauty of the world — makes me ache."

"I know, you think so now," I said, very softly, thankful that he would talk to me, for once, of himself and what lay under the quiet surface of the pool. "But it is n't the reality of you."

"The reality of me — is dead," he murmured, as if to himself.

"Or in a trance," I dared to suggest. "Forgive me. But I think realities can't die."

He laughed almost angrily. "You're an optimist, if not a philosopher."

"Yes," said I, "I suppose I'm an optimist, if it's believing that good must triumph over evil, and that the sun has power over darkness. As for being a philosopher, I'm not sure I know what it means, unless it's not stubbing your brain against nasty, gnarly things which get in your way, but need n't be of vital

importance unless you think they are. Because it seems to me, nothing that happens to you in this world matters so much as what you think about it."

Miles looked at me with that steady look he has, and most great soldiers must have — kings, too, I fancy: the look of eyes which have gazed toward far horizons, and have seen death face to face.

"You seem to have put some questions to yourself — and answered them — according to your own satisfaction," he said, "though you're hardly more than a child. Compared to me, you *are* a child."

I was not sure whether I were being snubbed, or merely given honorable mention. In any case, I thought it safer to change the subject. "The nicest new acquaintance I've made since you went away," I remarked, "is Black Bachelor."

"You've been to see my horse, then?" inquired Miles.

"Yes. You said I might. He's a darling. And he's almost well again. He was very kind to me when I called on him. What a gentleman he is! Man or horse, one can't be more than perfect."

"It's a great compliment if he took a fancy to you. He got his name of 'Bachelor' because he'd never look twice at a woman. Why, even —" Miles stopped short, with an air of distress. But instinct told me what he had been about to say. I knew from Lady Meldon — who spoke of it in the days of Miles's happiness — that she chaperoned Helène Garde once on a few hours' visit to Culver Castle. I was sure Miles had been on the point of telling me that Black Bachelor had n't cared even for Helène. How horrid of me! but I could n't help loving that adorable horse six times better than before — which is saying a lot. It is

good to think there's something that belongs to Miles and lives in his house, which puts me before Helène Garde.

I can't be certain whether Miles is going to like me less, or tolerate me more, after this, our first intimate conversation. I was just a little discouraged at the end, when I came to think it all over, for he asked me no questions about Laurie. If he had been drawn to me, rather than repelled, would n't he have inquired what I thought of his brother's health, or wanted to know how Laurie and I got on together? Another bad sign: before he left me, he slipped back into absent-mindedness. His eyes turned to agate. Maybe this was my fault. Or perhaps it was the fault of the headache, from which I could see he was suffering. And I suffered, too, though I could say nothing, and could only try to lure his thoughts out of the fatal circle where they live with Laurie, Helène and the past. Oh yes, I did try hard to make him think of other things. And I'm afraid, among those other things, I wished to put myself. For you know, Book, if only people could see the *real* You, not just the cruel caricature they so often paint and hold up in front of the real You, like a screen or a mask — perhaps they might learn to care for you a little — even such splendid, important people as Miles might learn. I do love him so! He lights the world for me, though I have the fear always before me that I only darken it for him. And just supposing that I judged *him* from the things he said to me? Why, I should n't be able to look behind the mask. I should perhaps believe him hard, and commonplace, and almost dull, as he believes me. For every once in a while, if we're talking together, when he remembers that he's speaking to me,

and is bound to me for life, as my husband, I can see him deliberately shut the windows between my soul and his, lest I dare to look in. And the glass of those windows is very thick, gray glass, with winter ice on the panes. Only very dimly can I see the fire burning in the hidden room, far away on the other side.

December 9th.

There have been several more callers at the Castle. I had had to receive them alone, but the excuse is a very good one. Everybody seems to realize that the circumstances are exceptional, and to make allowances. I wonder just *how* exceptional they think the circumstances are? I do my best to look as nice and dignified as I can, for the sake of Miles's credit. But I imagine people thinking: "That insignificant little thing! How *could* he, after the beautiful Helène Garde?" Oh, it *isn't* for myself I mind — truly I believe it *isn't*. It is that I can't bear to have him misunderstood, and thought to be heartless.

One perfectly sweet woman called to-day — a Lady Mount-Neven — evidently quite an old friend of Miles'. She looked so disappointed — or I imagined it — at sight of me, that I longed to cry out: "Oh, *don't* think he married me because he'd forgotten his love, or wanted my horrid old money. It was all for his brother's sake!" Fancy the effect if I had — with the best intentions! Lady Mount-Neven would have thought me mad, and called for help.

Another woman I like has been here. At least, I like things she said. She is a pupil of some one in London who lectures about what she — this Mrs. Cairne — calls New Thought. She could talk of noth-

ing else, and I grew interested, especially as some of her ideas I seemed to have been *born* knowing — as if I'd brought the memory of them back with me, from some other incarnation. I encouraged her to go on; and since, I've been practicing her theories. I assert, when I get up in the morning — and lots of other times too — that I am courage, and strength, and love, and happiness. If only I *could* be them all, I would give out the warmth of the inward flame to Miles, like the glow of a soul-awakening fire.

To-morrow, Doctor von Waldhausen, the great specialist from Berlin, is due to arrive. His is the word of life or death for Laurie. Miles has said nothing of what he feels, but his face is more haggard than ever, with the suspense he is bearing alone. I would give my very life to comfort him — and to comfort Laurie too. But the best I can do for Miles is not to bother him. As for Laurie, he has not sent for me since Miles came home.

Sometimes I fear that, after the suspense is over, one way or the other, Miles will break down at last, and be very ill. But Mrs. Cairne says that one must n't fear anything in the world: that to be afraid of them *makes* bad things happen. There's something in that, I believe! If I were a dog — quite a nice, kind dog, but with rather a sense of humor — and I saw that people were afraid of me, I would long to spring at them and bite.

Still December 9th, Night.

I must write it down — only a few words. To tell it to my Book gives me strength.

When the last post came this evening, there was a parcel addressed to Lady Culver. On it, was a very

strange stamp, such as I had never seen before. The packet was brought to me in the library; and as I was looking at it, in that silly way one has, instead of opening it at once, Miles walked in. He has n't often shown himself in the library when I was there; and hardly had he opened the door wide enough to catch sight of me, when he began to apologize, as if the room were mine. "Laurie wants a book that ought to be here; 'Gil Blas,'" he explained, and came in. It seems as if some strange fate had ordained that he should arrive at that moment. But if only I had not played into its hands!

Because of a selfish wish to detain him, to draw his attention from Laurie's book to myself, I brought this dreadful calamity down upon us all. I said: "Look at the queer stamp on this parcel. Can you make it out? I can't."

He came and bent over the small square packet, which looked battered and old enough to have come from the other end of the world. My heart beat fast, as it always does when he is near.

"Why, somebody at the North Pole has been thinking of you," he said. "Have you any friend away on some polar expedition?"

"No, indeed, not that I know of," I answered. "And the handwriting is strange to me. If I'd ever seen it before, I should remember, for it's clever and original—not one to forget."

"Well, you'd better cut the string," Miles suggested, looking rather thoughtfully at the weather-beaten parcel. "Then you'll know. It must be for you—there's no other Lady Culver. And yet—I can't make out the date. I—"

"Do hand me that paper-knife on the desk," said

I. "It's a wicked looking thing — might cut a throat as easily as a cord."

"Perhaps it has already," said Miles. "A man who thought I saved his life gave it to me in South Africa. It was n't a paper-knife then. Here goes." And he cut the crossed and recrossed strings, as I held out the package.

Quickly I opened it: paper after paper: inside three wrappers, a little box of plain white wood, with the cover lightly tacked on; and slipped under more string was a letter, addressed to "Lady Culver," in the same handwriting as that on the wrapper. The envelope was not fastened; and, asking Miles to open the box, I drew out a folded sheet of paper.

"You'll be Lady Culver by the time this can reach you," was the beginning of a short note, covering only one page. "I am sending my little wedding-present to you, back toward civilization in care of Esquimaux. It will be posted, sooner or later, and may perhaps reach you months from now. You will remember when I began my 'labor of love'? It was literally that — as you knew then, and won't have forgotten, when you see it finished. At that time it was n't meant for a wedding-present. I had your permission to keep my work till I saw the original of the picture again. I left for the North, hoping to win some little kudos, which might be worth offering you, like a new wreath of laurels. You went to England. On reaching Alsingfors, I read, in an English paper already old, the announcement that you will shortly marry Sir Miles Culver. So now, before the North swallows me up, I send you the miniature (which was to have been mine) as a wedding-present. May you have happiness is the wish of yours ever,

JOHN CORLISS."

My eyes had flashed down the page to the name. I remembered it: that of an artist, who had volunteered to go in search of the North Pole with the Norman-Vauderell expedition, and paint pictures of polar scenery.

Though there was no beginning to the letter, I guessed for whom it was meant — guessed the whole story. The thought of what was in the box made me cry out, almost involuntarily, "Oh, don't open it — don't open!"

But I was just too late. Miles had pried up the cover with the knife from South Africa, and in thrusting the sharp blade between the two flat pieces of wood, he had torn the tissue paper which protected the contents of the box. Lifting up the cover, the paper came too, and showed the face of *Helène Garde*, smiling her strange, alluring smile — the mystery smile of all womanhood, since time began. There she was, on a square of ivory, beautiful as in life; and looking into the pictured eyes he had loved, Miles gave a groan, staggered, and fell back. For an instant he seemed striving half consciously to save himself, then he dropped heavily, striking his head against the desk.

I sprang to him, calling his name, but he lay still, and did not answer. Somehow — I hardly know how — I lifted his shoulders, and got his head on to my lap, I sitting on the floor. There was a stain of blood on his temple, where he had cut it against the sharp molding of the desk.

The dreadful thing was that his eyes were not closed. In his unconsciousness they were half open, with all the life and light struck out of them, as if the sight of *Helène Garde's* face had killed him. At first I thought it had. I believed that he was dead. But

my hand on his heart told me that he still lived; and I remembered hearing that, if people fainted, their heads should be laid low. Then gently I slipped my knees out from under his head and shoulders, his blood making a long red streak on my white dress. There was a soft rug for him to lie upon, and leaving him there, terribly pale and still, I was just about to ring the bell when I recalled what Miles had said to me, the first day in the library. This was one of the bells that did not ring! so I had to leave him lying there, while I ran to tell the butler that Sir Miles had fainted. He fetched Edward, and the two came hurrying to the library, struck into dumbness by their great terror.

They carried him up to his room — slowly, painfully, for he is tall and strong, while the old butler is but a poor creature physically, and the footman past his best. I went with them, helping a little now and then. We were careful to make no noise, when coming near the invalid's room, for this thing that had happened must be kept from him as long as possible, and at last, the news broken gently.

I saw my husband's room for the first time. As the housekeeper told me, it is bare and forbidding as a soldier's quarters. But we laid him on the bed, and Edward ran to send a groom off to Court-Culver for a doctor — the one who attends Laurie.

When this man, who is named Henderson, came an hour later, Miles was still unconscious, but no longer lying as if dead. His pallor had changed to a deep flush, as of fever, and his head — which I had bandaged — was rolling uneasily from side to side. He was talking strangely, in a mumbling voice, occasionally calling out some name I did not know, or a word I could not understand. We had got him into

bed when the doctor arrived — such a hard, unyielding bed, that I could not bear to think of his lying there. But Dr. Henderson had said he must not be moved. When he comes to himself, he will want to be there — because he is used to the room, and because — still more important — he will wish to be near his brother.

But the question is: *when* will he come to himself? Dr. Henderson says that this illness has been hanging over him for a long time, and was “bound to come, sooner or later.” He would not take care of himself, in spite of warnings. “Over-strain,” and “the effects of shock,” are the doctor’s words. He admits that there is some congestion of the brain, which has been producing those constant headaches. A nurse must be sent for — since Laurie needs both his own; but meanwhile, I am to be allowed to help. Dr. Henderson is with Miles now, and will stay all night. I am supposed to be resting. But I could not sleep, and I wanted to write.

To-morrow the German specialist will come, and Miles will not even know. I must do what I can.

Now has come the time Lady Meldon prophesied. I can help a little, if I have the strength and courage. I must not fail. I can almost hear Miles imploring me to stand by Laurie in the coming ordeal. And I will — I will. But if only Laurie did not hate me so!

I must go and tell him about Miles. I dread this, very foolishly. Courage, *mon brave*!

*December 10th,
Early morning — before dawn.*

It was half-past ten when I knocked at Laurie’s door; very late, but he does not begin to get ready for

the night, I know, until twelve. It is his way, and the nurses do not thwart him when they can avoid it. I had wanted to get through the ordeal earlier, but it seemed that the invalid was asleep. His nights are so bad that he often makes up for loss of rest by dropping into a doze by day, and sometimes he sleeps for hours on end. He must have "lost himself" about the time that Miles came to me in the library, or soon after; and when I spoke to Sister Sturgis, explaining that I wished to tell her patient what had happened to Sir Miles, she said that very likely he might not wake till dinner time, or later. As it happened, when he did it was after eight. Then the nurse wanted him to have food, before hearing bad news; and when I proposed keeping it till morning, she feared that the delay would throw him into a rage. So it came about that my errand was postponed.

Sister Sturgis, who had sent word that I might now come, was expecting me, but for some reason — cowardice, to which this uncertain patient has reduced her — she had not told Laurie that I was coming. Consequently, when she opened the door at my knock, he looked astonished, and I knew that he was unprepared.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "This is an honor. My dear sister-in-law has invited herself to pay me a surprise visit."

He was in his most sarcastic mood. If my mission had been less serious, I should have turned and fled, for his tone frankly informed me that I was unwelcome. Unfortunately, the broad hint he gave me had to be disregarded. I walked into the room, under the battery of unfriendly eyes, which looked me over from head to foot with bold criticism, as if every-

thing about me, from the way I wore my hair to the buckles on my shoes, was irritatingly wrong.

"I suppose you've come to see what a convict looks like on the eve of his execution," was my host's next speech.

At first, before I had time to answer — for everything I'd rehearsed flew promptly out of my head — Sister Sturgis slipped away, murmuring some vague excuse about seeing the night nurse.

"I feel like a convict myself," I returned, when my head stopped spinning, "and — as if they'd bungled my execution."

This preface turned the current of his thought, and roused his curiosity as — on the spur of the moment — I'd hoped it might.

"What's happened?" he demanded. "Have you had a scene with Miles? You have n't — come to confess that you've told him —"

"No, no. I've told him nothing."

"There's something uncanny in your air. Wait. Don't explain yet. I want to guess first. You would n't have come here, at this time of night, without being sent for, unless there was something in particular. You know what's due for to-morrow. You think, if that German chap says there's no hope, you may never get the chance of seeing me alone again — that I'll sport my oak, and perhaps do away with myself. You promised me never to tell Miles. Now you've come to say you think better of your promise. When I'm dead and out of the way, you'll speak — to spare him regret for an unworthy object — since you care for him. You're priding yourself on your honesty, in giving me fair warning — what? Have I guessed right?"

"No," I said. "You have n't guessed right. I shall never tell Miles. Living or dead you're safe from me. I should keep silence for your brother's sake, if not for yours. Just now, he'll need all our kind thoughts. He's suffering in body as well as mind. You know, he's been ill for a long time. He's been keeping up, just for you; and the strain of keeping up has made him worse. So if he has broken down a little, it will be the best thing for him in the end. Don't worry. He would hate that. The doctor has come—your Dr. Henderson. He's with your brother; and he's not anxious—really."

Laurie stared, frowning, as I went on. I thought he was going to burst out in some tirade of anger against me—I hardly knew why or what. But when the outburst came, it was against himself. "Miles ill!" he ejaculated. "What a brute I am not to have seen it. I realize now—how pale he's been—how dull and different from his old self. But I never thought of him—only of myself."

"He did n't want you to think of him," I said.

"No. But I ought to have thought of him all the more. I always was a selfish beast!"

"You've been a little spoiled, perhaps, so it's no wonder. And you've had to suffer dreadfully, lately," I tried to comfort him. "Don't blame yourself too much. And there's time to think of him, still. You have the dread of—to-morrow—hanging over you; and if in spite of all you can think of Miles—of your brother—it will show that you're able to rise to heights of unselfishness."

"You call him Miles?" To my confusion, Laurie caught me up.

"Only to myself — never to his face. I made a slip of the tongue."

"Oh!" The gloomy eyes brooded upon me, haunted with ghosts of questions, and I hurried to distract his attention. "I came to tell you why — your brother would n't be able to bid you good-night; and for a few days I expect Dr. Henderson will keep him quietly in bed. He has been suffering from severe headaches. Now he will have to give up for awhile, and relax. I'll come — if you'll let me — and bring you news of him, several times a day. As for to-morrow — you see, Sir Miles is a little light-headed, and perhaps he'll be given some drug. Anyhow, he can't meet the German doctor at the station, in the new motor-car, but I will."

"Oh — you will!" Laurie echoed. "And who will look after Miles, if he's light-headed?"

"I'll do that, till a nurse comes — if a nurse is needed. I know things about sickness. Once I took care of my cousin Marguerite, when she was ill. I wanted to do it. Oh, I am quite a good nurse!"

"Why should you do anything for either of us?" Laurie sulkily wanted to know.

"Why should n't I — if I can? It gives me an interest in life."

"I told you once that I hated you. There's no reason why you should be even decently civil to me, after that."

"Often, I have n't been civil," I said. "We've had some real cat and dog scenes. But your hating me is no reason why I should bother to hate you back again. And I don't. Hating is bad for the complexion. Now I must go. You're not to worry —

as I told you before. Next time I come, I'm almost sure I shall have good news."

"Thanks," he mumbled. "You're not quite so black as I painted you."

"No. Only a deep navy blue. Trust me, anyhow, to bring you the news."

"God knows why I should trust you to do that, or anything else," Laurie growled. "And yet — I feel inclined to, because you are so devilish queer."

With that I left him, and called his nurse. Then, I went to Miles's room, to relieve the doctor. There was some soothing medicine to give, and ice-bags to change on Miles's head: one for his forehead, one for the back of his neck. It sounded easy to do this, and so it would have been if he had not kept moving his head constantly. The ice-bag would not stay in its place for three minutes together, unless I held it there. But apparently it gave him comfort to see me standing by his bedside, in the dimly lighted room, with my hand on his forehead. He became less restless, and looked up at me from the thin, hard pillow, with a light in his eyes which seemed like pleasure. For a minute I felt the most exquisite joy. Almost, I could have died of happiness, because I thought he recognized me, and was glad to have me with him.

Soon I was disillusioned!

"Helène — my Helène," he murmured. And then he caught, in both his, my hand that was not engaged with the ice-bag. "I had such a ghastly dream," he said. "I dreamed that you — no, I can't tell it. Too horrible!"

"Don't try to tell me, dear," I forced myself to answer steadily. In my own heart I said, "If it's

Helène he needs, I must give her to him, no matter how much she costs."

"Do you love me still?" he asked.

"Yes. Yes, I love you," I assured him. My voice would break a little, being a brittle organ.

"Tell me, darling — tell me how much you care," he pleaded. And while I tried to think of the right words to give him peace, the door opened softly. The side of the iron bedstead was turned toward the door, so that Miles could not see it as he lay, or see the person who came in. I could see, however. It was Sister Sturgis who came tiptoeing across the uncarpeted oak floor. When close to me, she mumbled into my ear; but Miles paid not the slightest attention. He did not seem conscious of a new presence, but went on talking, monotonously.

"Mr. Culver insists upon being brought into the corridor," the nurse explained, in her sick-room voice. "We can do nothing with him — Sister Dallas and I. He says if we won't bring his wheeled chair outside this door, where he can look at his brother and judge how he is, he'll somehow drag himself here, on his hands. What are we to do?"

"Do as he asks," I answered, in the same low tone. And through my words and Sister Sturgis's, I could hear Miles babbling on, calling me "Helène," begging me to tell him that I loved him, "in spite of the dream." "Even that will be better than exciting Mr. Culver, and having a scene with him," I said. "Sir Miles won't be disturbed, I think, if you are careful."

It was hard to make this decision, for I could scarcely bear to have any one, Laurie of all others, hear Miles calling me "Helène," and the answers I must give to calm him. But I knew that were Laurie allowed to

work himself up into a high pitch of excitement, he would be in a pitiable state for the German specialist's examination. I had done all I could to pacify him, and I had failed. Now there was but a choice between two evils.

I heard the nurses when they cautiously wheeled Laurie's chair outside the open door, but I did not turn my head. Miles was talking, still clinging to my hand, while I stood by the bedside, pressing the ice-bag on his forehead.

"Tell me how much you love me, Helène," he said. "Again — again! I'm starving to hear you. Tell me!"

"It's more than I can tell," I answered.

"With all your heart?"

"Yes, with all my heart."

"With all your soul?"

"With all my soul."

Dear Book, I suffered in answering those questions put to Helène: suffered in hearing the love in his tones, for her: in knowing that he remembered his marriage as a "horrible dream"! Just at this moment his voice did not sound as if he were delirious, yet it was not the voice *I* knew. It was one I imagined sometimes, in picturing the *real* Miles, not as I saw him, but as he might be, with a woman he loved. He was gazing happily into my face, as I bent over him. All the hard lines were smoothed away, and he looked years younger, just as he had looked the day I first met him at Lady Meldon's, when he came with Helène to tell of their engagement. But it was my business to keep him happy; otherwise I mattered no more than some wavering shadow on the wall. I told myself this, and struggled to kill the pain in my heart.

"Will you stay here, and never leave me again?" he implored. "You've been gone so long — and the dreams came between us. You see, it was the ghastly headache I had always that brought the dreams. But they'll go now, if you'll stay."

"I'll stay," I promised. "Whenever you want me, I shall be here."

"Thank God!" he muttered. "And Lady Mel — dear Lady Mel! I'd like to see her, but not that girl."

"No girl whom you don't want to see shall come," I soothed him.

"Keep her away, then. She got between us somehow — in the dream. I can't remember how it was, because my head is n't right yet. It's only the first part that comes back — something to do with Lady Mel. The girl was there. I thought she was a pleasant little thing, but afterward — I felt hard to her. I wonder why? I've lost it now! What did she do to spoil our happiness? Or was it in the dream?"

"It was in the dream," I said. "The girl would n't have spoiled your happiness for the world."

"Well don't let her come here. I want only you, darling — and poor Laurie. Why do I say 'poor Laurie'? I seem to have said it often lately. Why?"

"I don't know," I stammered. "Perhaps that's part of the dream, too. Now, you will lie still for a moment, won't you, while I get more ice for your forehead, to stop the headache."

"Yes — but don't go far," he said. And then, when I had tiptoed to the other end of the room, where there was ice under a blanket, in a huge tin pan from the kitchen, he forgot his promise. I heard him calling

"Helène — Helène, where are you?" and I hurried back with the fresh ice in the bag, to find the current of his thoughts already changed.

"Where's Helène?" he inquired anxiously, and pushed me off when I would have laid the ice on his forehead. "She said she'd come back! Who are you?"

"Only a nurse," I answered.

"A nurse! I don't want a nurse. A minute ago this room was dark and cool, and I saw Helène dimly, through the twilight — my beautiful Helène, the only human being who can take away this pain in my head. She came down from Heaven on purpose. Now you've sent her away. I know who you are. It's no use pretending you're a nurse. The room's full of hideous light. It's so light it hurts my eyes horribly. My whole brain is lit up with electricity. I see you plainly. You're that *girl* — I can't remember your name. I don't want to remember it. I've no mercy on you, now I know you for what you are. Go away — go out of my sight."

"You're mistaken," I said, quietly and firmly, buoyed up with strength that did not seem my own. "I am not a girl — any longer. I'm a friend of yours, and truly, I'm your nurse. I shall have to stay till the doctor wakes. He's resting now. You mustn't take me for what I am not. You'll make yourself ill, and I shall be blamed. You don't want your poor nurse scolded, do you?"

"Go, and fetch Helène, then, and I won't have you scolded," he tried to bribe me. "I'm sick for the sight of her. That's what is hurting me. Nothing else. I'm sick for the sight of Helène."

"There's a woman in this room who loves you

dearly, with all her heart and soul," I assured him. "I can't see her face, but perhaps she's Helène."

"Where is she?" he asked, eagerly.

"She can see you. She's looking at you now. If you will shut your eyes, and try to go to sleep, maybe you'll feel her presence, and her love for you."

"Would she kiss me, if I shut my eyes? For God's sake, tell her to kiss me. It will give me new life."

"If you'll keep your eyes tight shut — if you'll let me hold your eyelids down, very gently, she — the woman who loves you — will kiss you on the forehead," I said.

"No — not my forehead. My lips."

"Very well. She will do that."

"Thank you. How kind you are! Yes, you *are* my nurse, not that girl; I see better now."

I laid my hand over his eyes, as he shut them. And then — oh, Book, I kissed him, kissed him on the lips. For the first time I kissed my husband, and he held me close, calling me "Helène." It is strange, what we can bear! But a tear fell from my eyes on his cheek, and I had to rub it off quickly with my handkerchief, lest he should notice something odd.

"You must let her go," I said. "It's your nurse who is speaking. You must let her go if you want her to come to you again."

He obeyed instantly, and I took my hand from his eyelids to put back the ice-bag that had slipped out of place.

"Where is she?" he wanted to know.

"Quite near. But you must sleep now. She can't come back till you've taken your medicine, and had a long doze."

"I'm afraid to sleep," he pleaded. "The dream

might come — the dream of Helène's being gone forever."

"You shall have only good dreams," I said. "Drink this medicine — for the sake of the woman who loves you. She wants you — oh, so much! — to get well."

He swallowed the stuff in the spoon, and closed his eyes. It seemed to me, as I drew my fingers along his wrist, that his flesh was cooler than before. Soon he dozed. For a while I stood watching him, until I realized that I was ridiculously tired, and that my knees felt broken. I wanted to save my strength, because I thought that, if he were going to mistake me for Helène often, I must be strong in body and soul, in order to go through such scenes constantly. As I crept mousily toward a seat, my eyes turned to the door. Just outside, masked in shadow, I saw Laurie, in the wheeled chair which they use to move him from one room to another. Much as I had hated the thought of his presence, for some moments I had quite forgotten that he was there — forgotten all about him indeed.

Catching my eye, he beckoned me imperiously. I dared not refuse, lest he should call out and waken Miles.

"I want you to tell me something," he whispered, almost inaudibly. "Swear that you'll speak the truth." He grasped my wrist mercilessly, and hurt me a good deal, but I would not struggle to free myself.

"I'll tell you nothing that's not the truth," I answered.

"Do you care for Miles?" he asked.

I hesitated for a second. Then I said, "Yes, I care."

"By Jove!" he mumbled, under his breath. "By

Jove! And you could go through a scene like that?"

"Perhaps I could n't have gone through it if I *did n't* care. I may have to go through more of the same kind."

"Heavens! Are you as hard as nails, or are you — I wonder *what* you are?"

"I leave it to you to find out, if it interests you at all," I said. "But here are the nurses to take you home. Are you satisfied now, and ready to go?"

"I'm ready to go," was his abridged answer. And his great eyes gazed at me searchingly, in the dim light, as if he would read my soul.

It was not long after this that Dr. Henderson came to relieve my watch. He made me so happy by saying that Miles's temperature had dropped from a hundred and four to a hundred and one, that all my tiredness seemed to fall away, like a hot, heavy cloak. I came to my own room, and found Miss Timpson waiting up. I reproached her for disobeying instructions, but she snapped at me, and "pooh-poohed" in the true Timpy manner: and it was so comforting to be waited on, and scolded, as if I were five years old instead of nearly twenty-two, that at heart I was glad she had defied orders.

When she tucked me into bed, volunteering to call me at six, I bade my sub-conscious self sleep like a top, so as to be fresh and strong for the day. But the S.C.S. was as insubordinate as Timpy herself. After an hour's heavy sleep it mutinied. I could not close my eyes again — literally could n't. They felt wide and round, as if they had no eyelids; so at last I got up, bathed and slipped on a dressing-gown. Ever since I have been writing by lamp-light. It is now

six o'clock, and I am due to relieve the doctor at half past. I expect Miss Timpson at any minute to steal in and see if I am awake. I think I'll make her brush my hair again. It's still in the long tail she plaited six hours ago, and perhaps it will cure the headache I have, if she —

The Same Night

Some one knocked at the door, and made me break my sentence short off, this morning. It was a hurried knocking, and brought my "heart into my throat." I flew to see who was there — knowing it would not be Miss Timpson at that door — and found Laurie's night nurse, Sister Dallas.

"Doctor Henderson wants you, quick, please," she said. "I don't think Sir Miles is worse — but there's some reason why you're needed at once. He called me, and I —"

But I did not wait to hear her explanation. Nothing mattered except that I was wanted. I ran ahead of the nurse, and she must have been far behind when I got to the tower.

The instant I had softly opened the door of Miles's room, I guessed why they had sent for me. He was demanding Helène, insisting that she had been with him last night, and that she had promised to come back.

"I thought perhaps you could pacify him, for you know we must keep him as quiet as possible," Dr. Henderson said, looking miserably uncomfortable, and even guilty, as Miles begged his "darling Helène" to lay her hand on his head, and cool his forehead.

"Of course, you were quite right to send," I re-

assured the doctor. Then I went to Miles, half dreading, half hoping, that once more he would take me for Helène.

He caught my hands eagerly, crying out with joy at sight of me. "You've come!" he exclaimed. "Thank God, I've got you again. Will you kiss me, my dearest?"

I bent down, and touched his hot forehead with my lips; and my hair — that long plait which I had no time to twist up — fell across his shoulder, and lay along his arm. When I lifted my face from his, he had wound my hair round his hand. He looked at the twisted brown mass wonderingly.

"Why, what hair you've got, Helène!" he said. "Beautiful, glorious! Often I've thought what your hair must be when it's undone. But I never imagined it like this. I did n't know a woman's hair could be so long, and thick — and soft." As he spoke, he raised the plait to his lips, and kissed it again and again.

Suddenly I saw myself as in a magic mirror, on my wedding morning, writing in my Breviary, with my hair over my shoulders. I had wished then that Miles might see it — my one real beauty — and had thought he never would. Now, here I was, in the same dressing-gown I wore that morning, and Miles was kissing my hair, telling me it was beautiful, the most beautiful hair in the world. Yet instead of giving me happiness, each word, each kiss, was a separate stab in my heart. What a strange world, where wishes, gratified, can bring pain in place of joy!

So it went on, until I persuaded Miles to shut his eyes and try to sleep. I promised not to leave him; and when he fell at last into a restless doze, I was sitting by the bedside with my hand in his, and my

hair, unplaited, spread over the pillow under his head. He would have it so.

At eight o'clock came the two nurses Dr. Henderson had telegraphed for to Kendal, but Miles was still dozing and waking, dozing and waking, and I could not leave him. I sat without moving much, until nearly ten, when he had had a refreshing sleep, and was for a few minutes quite reasonable. He recognized me; but luckily by that time he had turned his head, so that I could take my hair off the pillow, and he did not even know it had been there. If he was astonished at finding my hand in his, he expressed no surprise. Perhaps he did not realize he had been holding it, for as he opened his eyes I drew it gently away, and quickly remarked to one of the nurses, in a matter of fact voice, that I thought his pulse seemed more regular. Being himself for the moment, he was too kind to show his dislike of the girl on whom he "had no mercy," but merely said, in a dull, tired voice, "Oh, it is you? How did you come here? I'm afraid I've made everybody a great deal of trouble."

He was only too glad to let me go, now that he knew who I was; and the doctor, coming into the room just then, hustled me off to rest.

At three o'clock this afternoon the German specialist arrived, having lunched in the train. I met him at Court-Culver, in the motor-car which I bought, and had sent from London a week ago, thinking it would be a convenience. I forgot to tell my Book about this new member of the family, for there were so many other things to say; but I'm very glad we have it now, and that the chauffeur seems a good reliable fellow.

Miles had meant to meet Dr. von Waldhausen, and

I had to explain why he was not able to come. Fortunately the great man speaks English very well, for I have only a school acquaintance with German, and every word I knew deserted me as I saw the large figure looming toward me, along the station platform.

I imagined that I should not like him much, because the fee he demanded appeared to me extortionate. I thought, for such a man as Sir Miles Culver, a doctor ought gladly to have offered his services at half price! And if he had been more moderate, possibly Miles need not have sacrificed himself by marrying me. He might have worried along, somehow, without the wretched money for which he has paid so dear.

Well — it's useless thinking of that now! And after all, I *do* like Dr. von Waldhausen. Seeing the man, I realize how stupid and narrow-minded I was in my prejudice. He is a German; so why, when one thinks of it, should he rob himself to do honor to an English soldier, no matter how great? He too is great in his way; and I felt this, the moment I saw the big, noble head — felt it even before he spoke or looked at me. He is fair and florid, with bright chestnut hair, wavy and immensely thick, brushed back from his dome of a forehead. His eyes, under bushy auburn eyebrows, are deep set and wonderfully brilliant, of a yellow brown, the color of Scotch cairngorms. He has a short red beard like a sailor's, and carries his large head finely. Though he is a giant of a man, he is not disagreeably stout in the wrong places, like some Germans. I expected a much older person, but he does not seem to be over forty, and his whole personality radiates intelligence. I had a queer impression that I must be blind as a mole, and extremely material, not to see his huge figure surrounded by an aura.

He asked a number of questions, as we flashed back to Culver Castle in the new motor-car — which had his small, bright green German trunk on the luggage-carrier. I answered as well as I knew how; and when we reached home, I showed the great man to his room, before going to tell Laurie. I wanted to do this myself because, now I'd made his acquaintance, I could describe the formidable in such words as to inspire Laurie with confidence.

"Well — what's the brute like?" was the first question thrown at me, when I'd been received by Sister Sturgis.

"He is n't a brute. He's splendid, and you'll like him," I said. "Why, the very sight of the man snatches one from darkness to light — the light of science. It will make you feel better just to speak with him. I can't help being encouraged already."

"Any one would think to hear you talk — any one who did n't know — that my health was a matter of importance to you, Lady Culver," said Laurie.

"Oh, well," I explained, smiling my bomb-proof smile, "even hard American women like me are almost human under their alligator-skin binding. I have got used to you now, and so I'm rather interested."

"H'm!" he ejaculated, as he so often does in answer to my sayings, wise or foolish. "Will you bring Von Waldhausen here?"

"If you like," I said. "I was going to introduce him to Sister Sturgis, downstairs, and let her shed him upon you."

"As Miles can't, I prefer to have his wife, rather than my nurse, do that business. Seems to me more fitting," Laurie grumbled.

"Very well," I agreed; and went off to carry out

the order. But I appeared about a hundred times more calm about it than I felt. I have no reason to love Laurie Culver, but it's impossible not to pity him; and I find that, in his case, pity really is akin to a kind of love — a sentimental proverb which I used to doubt.

When I had introduced the doctor to his patient — who looked pale and boyish — I was about to vanish discreetly, when the great man spoke. "Will you return in one hour," he asked, in his stiff, correct English, "or would you prefer that I come to you in an appointed place?"

"She will come here," Laurie replied for me, quickly. I *was* surprised at that! But, of course, I took him at his word, and said that when the hour was up I would knock at the door.

"May you have the news to tell me then, which we are praying for!" I had exclaimed, before I knew that I was speaking aloud. Then I glanced at Laurie, almost frightened, lest he despise me more than ever, for the "gush" which he might consider hypocritical. But to my amazement, he held out his hand.

"Let us shake on that, before you leave me," he said, with a short laugh.

I put my hand in his, and he grasped it nervously. His fingers were ice-cold, and I tried to let the pressure of mine say "Courage — courage!" Our eyes met; and if I had not known how he disliked me — known that he was shaking hands just to dissemble politely before the foreigner, I should have read in his look an appeal for my prayers. Of course, he meant nothing of the sort, but all the same I turned away and got out of the room quickly to hide tears and a pink nose. And once in my own quarters, I did pray for

him, *hard!* I was sad to think how he must be missing his brother at such a time, and how alone he was in this great crisis, with nobody near whom he loved or trusted.

The hour of waiting seemed like ten hours. I did not stop in my own room through the whole of it, but went to Miles's door to ask the nurse on duty how he was. It was a joy, and seemed a good omen for Laurie as well, to hear that Miles's temperature had gone down again since morning, and that Dr. Henderson was pleased. I suppose I shall not be needed again very often, now there are two nurses to take care of him. And perhaps it's as well, for I don't know if I could bear many more scenes like those of last night and this morning.

Miss Timpson brought me tea while I was waiting for news, but I could not drink it. I was far too excited. A few minutes before the hour, already I stood in front of Laurie's closed door. I dared not knock, for the moment was not come, but I kept my eyes glued to the watch I always wear on my wrist. I fancied I could hear voices, but my blood sang so wild a song in my ears that I could not be sure which sound was real, which imaginary.

At last the minute-hand of my watch reached the right place. I tapped, but my hand trembled so that I had to knock again before they heard. Then it was Doctor von Waldhausen himself who opened the door.

Quickly I glanced from his face to Laurie's — from Laurie's to his, but I could read nothing. In their eyes was neither joy nor despair. For a few seconds, nobody spoke. Then the doctor said, in a voice of determined cheerfulness, "There is hope. We shall try what we can do. But — cure is not certain. I

cannot promise that. I have to say that the case is a difficult one. And there is a serious drawback to the experiment, as I have had to warn Mr. Culver. If my treatment does not succeed it may have — a depressing effect on his system."

"He means to say it's kill or cure with me," said Laurie, harshly.

"No — no. That is not a fair way of putting the matter," the specialist objected. "I may not cure, I will not kill you. But there is this risk which I foresee. If I cannot make you a well man, you may be let down to extreme weakness, from which you must pull yourself up again, even to reach the place where you are now, by slow degrees. I have to tell you, Lady Culver, that your brother-in-law has not yet decided whether or no he will run the risk."

"Whether the game is worth the candle," Laurie amended.

"How I wish your brother were able to advise you!" I exclaimed.

"Meanwhile," said Laurie, "what's your advice?"

"I dare n't give any," I answered.

"What would you do in my place?"

"Before Lady Culver replies to that question," Dr. von Waldhausen interrupted us, "let us mention one thing which she may not know, though her brother-in-law knows, and no doubt her husband. If Mr. Culver is left in his present state, he cannot live a year."

"Oh!" I cried, sharply; and the shock of the news turned me faint.

"Forgive me," said the doctor. "I supposed you were aware already —"

"You need n't mind. It's no surprise to me," Laurie added.

"Whereas," the quiet voice went on, "I may cure him. If not —"

"I shall only drop off a little sooner," Laurie finished for him, breaking into the slight pause. "And look here, now I see it really hurts you, I won't ask your advice, or what you'd do if you were me. I'll decide for myself. Life is what I want, not mere existence. If I can't have real life, or something like it, I'll take death, thank you, and in mercy as soon as possible. I always did hate suspense, and swords dangling over my head. I'll have the serum, and chance the consequences."

I was thankful to Laurie for not insisting on my opinion. But my decision would have been the same as his.

December 12th.

Miles has been very ill, but is better now. After all, I have had to be with him a good deal, playing the part of Helène. Twice Laurie was outside the door in his wheeled chair listening, but thank Heaven he spared me any comments, afterward.

To-day Dr. von Waldhausen began his treatment. Laurie will not be able now to move about in the wheeled chair, or even to lie on the big sofa by the fire. He is to be kept in bed for the first week. At first the specialist thought it would be best for no one except himself and the two nurses to see the patient during that time, but for some reason he has changed his mind, and has asked me to be prepared to come, if sent for. I suppose this is because he does n't understand the real relations between this queer sister and brother-in-law. Why should he — how could he un-

derstand? I can't believe that Laurie has wished to except me from the order of banishment, and I think it rather sporting of him to have not told Dr. von Waldhausen that he hates me.

December 24th.

Christmas Eve; and for eleven days and nights I have had no time to write — no time to play that my dear Book holds my mother's love for me between its covers, or to come to it for comfort. Not that I really need comfort, of course, except in cowardly moments. I am strong, and as well as ever, though I feel a little tired; for I suppose it has been rather a strain.

Doctor Henderson has paid me compliments. He has called me brave, and said other nice things, which have puffed me up with pride and vainglory whenever I've had time to brood over them and think of myself. But in my heart I know that I don't deserve one word of his flattery. Nothing I have done is of the least credit to me, because I *wanted* to do it all. From the first it was my one great wish to help Miles, and now that wish has actually been granted to a certain extent, for the doctor assures me that I have been of use to him. I believe he means what he says when he tells me that if I had n't "stood by," Miles would n't be as far on the road to recovery as he is now. For a few days the trouble seemed more serious than Dr. Henderson prophesied in the beginning; but now, all danger is over. The brain is normal once more. Miles is very weak, but the delirium has passed. In a few weeks he is likely to be better than before his illness, for, in spite of himself, he will have had a rest cure.

For a few days after the delusions had gone, I did

not see Miles; but when I was considered worthy after a slight — a very slight — collapse in which I foolishly became rather hysterical one night, I was put on duty with Laurie. The German treatment, which is going on satisfactorily enough so far, makes him extremely irritable, and he has honored me by wishing to hear me read aloud. It seems Miles has been in the habit of reading to him constantly, since the accident. Now it is my turn; in fact, there is a truce between Laurie and me, and I feel quite proud, though I must say my brother-in-law's taste in novels is not mine. Often I read aloud from nine o'clock till midnight: and sometimes after that I am asked to go into Miles's room. His nurses say that he asks for me by name, so my theory is, that he wishes to save appearances — and my feelings. Such thoughtfulness would be characteristic. Perhaps he may have some dim recollection of the night when he shouted at me to "go away," and now he remorsefully wants to make up for it. I sit quietly in his room by the hour together; and I have seen him looking at me in a dreamy half-puzzled way, as if he wished to speak. But he has not spoken.

Four days ago Dr. Henderson told me that there was no longer need to "immolate" myself. I must go away, or if not that, I must have some "young friend" of my own age to spend Christmas with me, and brighten me up. When he asked if there were not somebody I'd like to have, I would unhesitatingly have said "no," if he had not added: "Some pretty girl, to help cheer up your husband."

This made me stop to think before replying. "Would it cheer him, to have a pretty girl — a stranger — here?" I asked.

"Of course it would. After all, Sir Miles is human, and a man," returned the doctor. Whereupon I said that I would invite my cousin to spend a fortnight. Suddenly it seemed providential that I had n't answered a letter of Marguerite's, in which she asked me to have her for Christmas. I did n't want her to come, and I intended to write — what was perfectly true — that with two invalids in the house I was n't able to entertain a guest. Aunt Dora had found an old school friend, an American lady married to an Englishman. She wished to visit this relic of a happy past, but Marguerite did not share her mother's desire. She thought Mrs. Pryce-Taylor frumpy and dull, and this was the reason she alleged for asking herself to Culver Castle. She knew that, at least, she would not have to bother about "being nice" to me. She could do as she liked. And beside, I suspected, she fancied it would be amusing to study the family life of Sir Miles and Lady Culver. Often she used to say, during the weeks of my engagement, "the whole affair is a mystery to me." I was not keen on affording Marguerite an opportunity for this study, and I believed that it would be better for every one not to have a visitor in the house — big as it is. But Dr. Henderson's words throwing a new light upon that theory, I wired Marguerite to come. She is to arrive this evening, by the same train which brought Miles and me to Court Culver on our wedding-night. She would have come yesterday, but Lord Burne invited her and Aunt Dora to dine with him at the Automobile Club. Marguerite telegraphed that she was delayed, and later wrote, explaining. Sometimes I think she would marry Lord Burne if he asked her. But perhaps that's rather a catty idea,

for Aunt Dora has often impressed it upon me that "no really *nice* girl wishes to become the wife of a man who has not already 'spoken.'"

Christmas Eve! A year ago, how little I thought that I would be married by this time, and of all men, to Miles Culver!

I've been looking at last year's volume of my Self Book, the one I was writing in up to my birthday. This volume — or most of it — I might, if I wanted to be euphonic, call "The Bride's Breviary." I have turned back to Christmas Eve, a year ago, and reading what I wrote then, makes me feel as if I had been a child. Marguerite and I were at a party — a Cinderella dance! I told my Book all about the dress I wore, and which partners I liked best. Poor little me! — what a baby I was! But the last thing of all — a sort of irrelevant P.S. tacked on to my account of the evening, was this: "I wonder how my Hero will be spending his Christmas? I send him good Christmas wishes from my heart, though he does n't know where it is (my heart, I mean) or that there is a Me, and he never will know."

That is rather strange, considering all, is n't it, O Book of the Bride? — poor Bride without a Bridegroom, whose Hero is farther from her now than in those days of childish romance, although he is her husband.

There's a Christmas present I want from you this year, my Breviary, my one dear lifelong friend with whom I can "let myself go," and be as silly as I like. Let's pretend now that, instead of pages and covers, you've a comfortable lap for me to sit on, and a soft, motherly shoulder to nestle my head against. There, that feels as Christmas Eve ought to feel! Now, we'll

go on playing dolls, please. We 'll play that Miles loves me and not Helène. There is n't any Helène in this beautiful game of ours. She simply does n't count. I'm the only one who matters. Oh, I matter a lot to Miles, and it's too lovely for words — but not too lovely to be true. It's *quite* true, in our game. This is the first time I've been bold enough to ask you to play it with me, dear Book, yet it is n't the first time I've played it by myself. At night, when I can't sleep for thinking of Miles, I play that he thinks of me, in the same way, but better thoughts if possible. Playing the same game in my Book will be like having one's cake, and eating it, too; for years from now I shall turn back to these pages, and maybe smile at the little blisters which mean — well, they don't represent *smiles!*

Just take a peep with me, Book, into my House of Dreams. Why, it's Culver Castle, is n't it? Yes, but a very different Culver Castle from the great, grim prison-house I came into at first. You can see from the very look of the rooms that they're brimful of happiness, every day. Do you hear Miles calling me? "Little girl — darling!" he says. And he is n't talking to Helène Garde, but to me, *me* — his wife, his wife whom he loves. He loves me dearly. Look at his eyes. Can't you tell by the way they plunge deep down into mine that I'm all the world to him? I'm as happy and happier than any of the brides I used to envy. I'd change with no one on earth. He is stroking my hair — mine, not Helène's. Don't you hear him say, "Dear, you are pretty — to me you are *very* pretty"? How wonderful it is to have his love! We tell each other everything. We have no thoughts which we can't share with each other. We are going

to travel. How glorious to travel with *him*! He has accepted that great appointment Government offered him on the Mediterranean, for Laurie is well again, and Miles can go away — with me. What a good thing he did n't refuse at first, as he might have done — or accept, and go without me. I'm glad he waited. They say, every blessing comes to him (why not her?) who waits. Who said that to me, I wonder? I believe it was Lady Meldon. I have just had a letter from her, a sweet letter, which made me happy for quite five minutes, but not as happy as I've been playing dolls with my kind Book, in the House of Dreams!

Oh, Book, I'm afraid that, after all, if you had a motherly shoulder, instead of cuddling cosily and happily down to purr, I should *howl* on it. It would be wet with tears this Christmas Eve, and your dress would be spoiled, just as I am spoiling your nice clean new page at this moment!

“Pull yourself together, my little Sandra!” Yes, I will, thank you, my patient Breviary. It's going to be all right, and so am I. *Au revoir*, now. I feel better for my play and my wail. I'm going to put powder on my nose, and trot off to meet Marguerite, my one fair cousin. I hope Dr. Henderson's prescription may be good for Miles!

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Same Evening.

Marguerite is prettier than ever, and unusually agreeable. She has been here six hours, and has n't snubbed me once. I suppose that's the reward of being Lady Culver. But she says I don't look well. Of course I knew that, but it makes me feel worse

to be told. It's like seeing myself in an unbecoming glass. And Miles is to be got out of the tower for the first time to-morrow. He does n't wish it, but he's too weak or indifferent to protest when Dr. Henderson tells him that he is to be "helped into his wife's boudoir, for a change." Poor Miles! He is too chivalrous to say "My wife's boudoir indeed! *That* will be a change for the worse, instead of the better!" Rather will he be martyred, and take up the old task of stilted politeness to "that girl," which he was wearily fulfilling before illness saved him the trouble.

Oh, Christmas is to be quite a fête day at Culver Castle, I assure you, Book; and the scene of the principal festivities is to be her ladyship's boudoir. Laurie is to be wheeled in, too. I don't know if Dr. von Waldhausen would have counseled this, but he left for his own Christmasing in Berlin, yesterday morning; and for good and all, for better for worse, has placed his patient again under Dr. Henderson's less rigid rule.

Marguerite was much interested when she heard the programme for Christmas. She has proposed that she and I go out early to gather green branches and red berries to decorate my sitting-room. That ceremony had not occurred to me as appropriate. I almost envy her the festive idea. But then, Marguerite does n't know yet how little heart there can be under any festivities for Miles. I wonder if she suspects? She has asked several rather leading questions, and her eyes are so bright with some emotion, which I can't help taking for curiosity, that they look as if they'd been polished with emery-powder.

December 25th.

Merry Christmas to my Book!

It's a good many years since I began to give you that greeting. We grow old together, my Breviary and I. Nearly ten years, man and boy, have we been each other's "Jo-Johns."

This time — though I've been granted the great wish beyond my dreams — to be Miles Culver's wife — I'm afraid our Christmas has not been a very merry one. Still, I would n't go back to the days in dear California when I was Sandy — no, *Sandra* — Phayre, and had never seen my Hero. That is, for my own sake I would n't choose to go back and have eyes which had never looked upon him, ears which had never heard his voice, fingers which had never been touched by his, even in a cold "How-do-you-do?" handshake. But for *his* sake — ah, I don't know! For if, after all, living in his beloved Culver Castle, and being attended by famous Dr. von Waldhausen, cannot save Laurie, Miles's sacrifice for his brother will have been in vain, and there would have been nothing — *nothing* for him to regret in not having met "that girl on whom he has no mercy."

Well, it has been Christmas, and soon it will be the day after Christmas. Everything has passed off *quite* differently from what I expected, and Marguerite has been the greatest success, the heroine of the occasion. I ought to be very pleased with the result of Dr. Henderson's prescription; and so I might be, if in some forgotten incarnation I had n't been a spiteful cat.

Yes, that's just the truth of me, laid bare at last, down to the *fur*. I don't believe I was even a pretty, white Persian cat that every one loved and petted. I

was probably a mere everyday, half-starved and consequently bad-tempered gray kitten.

To begin at the beginning of the Cat's Confession, or a Tale of Christmas (I might more appropriately spell — t-a-i-l) : —

I waked up, and had Christmas presents. There were several. One was from Aunt Dora: a tea-cosy, for she is becoming *quite* English. I'll write that "I shall think of her whenever I look at" — I can't say use — "it"; because if there's anything I detest, it's stewed tea. One from Marguerite: a jade bangle, "to remind me of Chinatown." She forgets that I gave it to her two years ago. But that is a detail. And why should n't jade bracelets, cast upon the waters, return after many days? This part of the confession is not meant to be mean, for I'm quite pleased to have anything from dear old Chinatown.

A few presents from girls I knew slightly at home, with letters wishing me "merry Christmas," and saying they intend to sail for England soon, when they "hope for the pleasure," etc. Would they have remembered me if it were not in my power to invite them to a castle?

Handkerchiefs, adorned with crowns in rich embroidery, from that socialist-democrat, Miss Timpson. I'm morally sure they're the wrong sort of crowns — far above my rank: and even if not, I look *most* unsuited to them, which reminds me of the dowdy duchess in a shop, who mildly ordered "a duchess's coronet" put on her hankies. "Oh, madam, I *would n't* have a *duchess's*," suggested the attendant; and thus I doubt not would I be advised according to my humbler degree in the same circumstances.

Of Christmas cards, dear and dull, cheap and gush-

ing, there's no end. And last but not least, gifts from dear "Lady Mel" and Mr. Graeme. From her, "Omar" illustrated by Dulac; from him, the Douglas Heart in amethysts and diamonds. Lady Meldon would have come to see Miles, but has been tied at home nursing her brother through an attack of gout.

My "Christmas box" for Marguerite was an ermine stole and granny muff. I would have sent this present off with others, obtained by diligent study of London shop-catalogues; but Dr. Henderson's advice came just in time for me to keep it back. She was pleased, and our Christmas opened well. Yet I had heart-burnings concerning Miles and Laurie; I knew they would be remembered by many friends, still, it seemed sad that they should have no home gifts. Laurie has been more reserved than ever lately, but once he told me that of all things he hated suspense; and suspense is the burden of every hour now. It is far from certain that the Von Waldhausen treatment will work a cure, and for Laurie Christmas can bring no brightness, except the assurance of Miles's improving health. For Miles himself there must be constant torture in remembering happier days. And feeling this, behind the barrier that separates us, the longing grew in me to give them some faint ray of Christmas cheer. I racked my brain and thought without result, until Laurie mentioned to Sister Sturgis (I being in the room) two fox-terriers which he and Miles once owned and loved. Miles, he said, was eighteen and he six years old when the dogs were got for them of a dealer near Kendal. The pair were named Castor and Pollux, commonly known as the Heavenly Twins; and though their ways were far from heavenly the Castle had never been quite the same to their masters since they died. "I'd

give a good deal," Laurie said, "to see those two little beggars come racing into my room now!"

This gave me an idea; and one afternoon when I was ordered by the doctor a dose of fresh air, I motored to Kendal, found the man who bred fox-terriers, and bought his two best puppies — brothers. I had "Castor" and "Pollux" engraved on silver collars, and on Christmas morning the babies were to have been let loose in the west tower. Of course I'd no intention of mentioning myself in connection with the new arrivals. It was to appear that they had dropped from the sky. But at the last minute my courage failed in carrying out the programme. Perhaps after all Miles and Laurie might resent having a menagerie forced upon them. If they had wanted successors to the old favorites, they could have bought fox-terriers for themselves.

While I sat with the puppies in my lap, wondering what to do, Marguerite appeared, ready to go out.

"Well, shall we get our Christmas decorations?" she had begun, when her eye fell upon the Heavenly Twins.

"Oh, the darlings! Are they a Christmas present from your husband?" she wanted to know.

I explained reluctantly: "No, a present for him: a surprise to remind him of old friends. But I don't want him to know they're from me. I meant to put them outside Miles's door, and see what happened, but after all, I'm not sure they won't be a bother —"

"Oh, if he's not to know they're a present from you, do let me manage the surprise," broke in Marguerite. "Wait till this afternoon, when Sir Miles and his brother come to your sitting-room. Then, if the sweet pets are n't appreciated, we can keep them."

This struck me as not a bad notion. I accepted it, and Marguerite and I went out in quest of Christmas holly.

With the help of a gardener we collected a goodly store of coral-hung branches: and Marguerite was almost too enthusiastic about the park and Castle seen by daylight. She thought the Tudor front built in Queen Elizabeth's time, after a great fire, alone "worth the money I had paid to be Lady Culver." The mellow old stone with its splashes of yellow, green and rose, glowing jewel-like where ivy let the walls be seen, called forth a storm of adjectives. And above all things she loved the ancient yew-hedges and trees, clipped quaintly in shapes of animals. "Well," she sighed, "if I'd seen all this in time, I'd have been just as keen as you to fight tooth and nail for Sir Miles. Lord Burne's place is n't a patch on Culver Castle."

I was glad to change the subject, for one may not snap on Christmas day. But there was vinegar in my question: "Are you particularly interested in Lord Burne's place?"

"I should be, if we could afford to marry," she replied.

"Oh! I did n't know," I murmured.

"But you suspected?"

"No, the last I heard, it was Jack Jewett."

"Oh, that's an old story. It was mother's little scheme. You *must* have seen that Cyril — Lord Burne — was in love with me as far back as last summer."

No doubt I was blind; but as Lord Burne proposed to me in August, it did n't occur to me at the time that he was in love with Marguerite. Only the enlightened realize without prompting the wisdom of proposing to one girl while you're in love with another, if the

first is rich and the other poor. But I am living and learning.

"Perhaps you were too much taken up with your own affairs to notice what was going on with other people," Marguerite suggested.

"Perhaps," I admitted.

"If only I had even a thousand pounds a year of my own, we might be able to marry," she went on, wistfully. "What a curse poverty is! But you don't understand. You've always had everything you wanted, from the most expensive doll up to the most — desirable husband."

"Aunt Dora said you were making up your mind to marry Jack Jewett," I persisted, stolidly.

"She can't bear to give up the idea yet. The Jewetts are rolling in money, and I could do a lot for mother. But as far as family's concerned, they're *nobody*. Of course they count over on our side, but here they just don't matter. And I want to matter anywhere."

"It was the Jewetts who introduced Lord Burne," I reminded her.

"They're merely acquaintances of his, not friends. They are n't in his *set*. Besides —"

"Besides — what?"

"Oh well, I don't mind saying to you that I'd like to be Lady Burne. You're Lady Culver, and — it goes against the grain with me to end up as plain Mrs. Jewett. Lord Burne's a viscount, you know."

"Yes. And Miles only a baronet," said I, catching her meaning. "It's like a game of poker. You 'see me, and go one better.'"

"*Two* better," laughed Marguerite. "*One* better would be a baron. But best of all — I *like* my viscount."

"If you really loved him, I'd see what could be done about the money part," I began. "But —" and I was going on with a short moral lecture, when Marguerite caught me up.

"Oh, thank you a thousand times!" she exclaimed, taking the rest for granted. "You *are* a dear girl! I suppose you're so happy yourself that it's a joy to you making others happy."

But I was not to be "drawn" on the subject of myself. "It's time for church, if we're going," I said, and turned in the direction of Court-Culver.

Marguerite admired the great banqueting hall of the Castle so much that I consented to lunching and dining there for the first time, though I quite dreaded giving my order to the butler.

The table for two was like a tiny white island in a vast, dark lake, when my cousin and I sat down to lunch in a room big enough to feast fifty people. Marguerite appeared to enjoy the meal, however, and was in splendid spirits. She let me see clearly that she took my promise as given, and that she meant to hold me to it.

My worldly spectacles, borrowed from Laurie, show that Marguerite had at least two birds to kill with one stone at Culver. She was always a clever shot. From the time we finished luncheon till four o'clock she was busy writing to Lord Burne. "Cyril," it seems now, was always her favorite name for a man, though I remember when "Jack" was well in the running.

At four, Marguerite disappeared to make herself pretty for the "party," consisting of Miles and Laurie; and after all, it was abetted by Miss Timpson, who dressed the sitting-room in honor of our visitors. Marguerite's was the suggestion, mine the work: a

combination not unknown in our family history. But it was love's labor, and I liked it, though it left no time for decorating Sandy.

This did not seem important until the return of a radiant Marguerite in a gold-embroidered white cashmere (spoils of my trousseau) which put my dark tailor-made to shame. Marguerite, in her white daintiness, a band of gold in her brown-gold hair, made me look a frump in contrast: but it was too late to change, and ten minutes after she appeared in her glory, Laurie was wheeled in. Now that he is allowed — even ordered — to move about again, a man attendant has been hired for him, in addition to the nurses; and the new importation — a giant — aided by a groom, easily carries the invalid up and down stairs, seated in a kind of swing. From this apparatus Laurie is transferred into the wheeled chair, on reaching the end of his journey. All this sounds as if he were better than in pre-Von Waldhausen days, but — I am not sure.

Following, came Miles, strong enough now to walk unchaperoned. The two men wished us a "happy Christmas," though I saw by both faces how little the brothers enjoyed the prospect of this forced visit. For Laurie, I guessed that it was especially distasteful, for his vanity makes him pathetically sensitive, and he has consented to see only a few old friends since the accident that wrecked him.

Not a woman, except "Lady Mel," the two nurses and I, has been allowed a glimpse of his marred beauty; and I suspected that to meet a stranger, a pretty girl like Marguerite, would be for him more of an ordeal than for Miles. But Dr. Henderson, meaning well for all of us, had insisted on the programme: and doubtless

Laurie feared to offend or grieve Miles by refusing to keep him in countenance. As for Miles, I understand more easily his consent. His chivalry would rebel against protesting: "No, doctor! my first outing shall *not* be a Christmas visit to my wife! If you insist on a change, I prefer sitting in the cellar!"

At all events, there they were, martyrs to politeness. When Laurie's chair had been wheeled near the fireplace, and Miles had established himself by request in a corner of the sofa, I began secretly to dread the conversation. I could think of nothing important enough to say, after the first few commonplaces: but I need not have worried. Marguerite saved me all trouble. And instead of seeming conventionally pleased to meet my cousin, to my surprise and — at first — joy, they appeared genuinely delighted with her. Dr. Henderson was right. He knows men.

From the first moment of their coming Marguerite was a changed creature. The presence of men always acts upon her as a stimulant — like a glass of iced champagne on a day of summer heat. But never had I seen her burst into blossom with such sudden radiance.

Once, before his accident, she saw Laurie at Lady Meldon's. After our engagement she met Miles three or four times, and complained, half jokingly, half in earnest, that he was "the only man who ever looked straight through instead of at her." But evidently she bore him no grudge for his indifference. Her manner was charming. She put on no airs of familiarity, because of the "family connection," yet she was n't shy, or awkward, as I should have been in her place — and indeed was, in my own.

At first I was relieved when I saw her making —

as she would have called it — “a hit with the audience,” but gradually, all that there is of CAT in me came mewling to the surface.

It began with the decorations. “I *made* Sandy have them,” she explained. “I did so long to see what the effect of red berries and green branches would be against this wonderful old oak, which she seems to take for granted, like any other background. Sandy has such a tidy, matter-of-fact mind, she does n’t love ‘messes’; but I do — beautiful, sweet-smelling messes like this lovely stuff. For, you see, my mind is n’t a bit tidy or well-ordered, as hers is. I suppose that’s because I’m only a poor relation whose opinions are of no importance in the scheme of things. And I volunteered to take *all* the trouble off her hands.”

Now, would any normal girl have been pleased with this, in my place? I ask you that, my Book — as man to man!

For one thing, that expression, a “tidy mind,” was my invention. Once in a moment of rebellion I accused Aunt Dora of it. So here were two more birds — small ones this time — being killed with one stone. Marguerite could revenge her parent, and show me up as a prig. As for “volunteering to take all the trouble” off my hands, it was quite true: she had volunteered. And I had done the rest.

I suppose, if my boasted sense of humor were warranted to stand wear and tear, and not to shrink in the wash, I should only have laughed in my sleeve at Marguerite’s funny tactics; but one’s feeling for the ridiculous is n’t as quick to act against oneself as others, I notice with regret!

When Marguerite had been thoroughly complimented, she seized exactly the right moment to pro-

duce the fox-terriers, asleep in an intricate double knot of puppyhood. Their début was made extra dramatic by whisking off a rug which had hidden their basket till wanted.

"Aren't they sweet?" she appealed to Miles. "Guess their names."

"Yankee Doodle and Dandy," he hazarded, smiling kindly, as if at a charming child. He has never smiled like that at me. When I am a child in his eyes, it is because I have done something foolish.

"No. Castor and Pollux," said Marguerite. "Because they really *are* heavenly twins!"

Miles was interested. "That's an odd coincidence," he remarked. "My brother and I, when he was a little boy and I was a big one, had fox terriers called Castor and Pollux. These might be their great, great grandchildren."

"Anyhow, I hope they'll be great favorites!" Marguerite replied. "But the names *are n't* a coincidence. Those dogs of yours became historical characters, because they *were* yours. I don't know how the story leaked out, but it did. And you see it is n't forgotten."

"You don't mean to say that you heard of our old pets, and named these nice little beasts of yours after them?" Miles explained.

"I don't mean to tell you anything about these nice 'little beasts,'" Marguerite quoted gayly, "except that they are n't mine. They're yours. A Christmas present for — my new cousin-in-law."

"A present from you to me?" Miles asked, surprised and apparently charmed.

"Ah, but it *would* be telling about them, if I told you that," laughed Marguerite. "You might think it

a liberty, and refuse to accept them if you knew who was the giver."

"I assure you I should n't," said Miles.

"Well, please shake hands, then," she pleaded, prettily.

Miles held out his hand. "You *are* a generous cousin-in-law!" he said, with the happiest laugh I have heard from his lips since the days when he was Helène Garde's lover. "Thank you, in Laurie's name and my own."

"But you're not to thank me!" cried Marguerite. "And anyhow, the Heavenly Twins are all for you, not for Mr. Culver. *He* is not my cousin-in-law, so I should n't dare think of making him a present — yet."

This speech subtly conveyed a compliment to both. She flirted beautifully, without letting them see that they were being flirted with. But she looked from one to the other so engagingly — at Miles with a kind of innocent hero-worship; at Laurie a little wickedly in tribute to his Byronic cast — that neither could help being flattered.

As for me, I regret to say that I could have boxed Marguerite's ears. She had n't told a single fib, in concrete words, but of course, the Heavenly Twins would now go down to posterity as her Christmas gift to Miles.

Afterward, she apologized to me, saying that, as I'd told her I did n't wish the puppies to be known as my gift, she thought she had helped me out of the difficulty.

"So you did," I agreed, "very cleverly."

"Then you're pleased with my way of arranging it for you?" she wanted to know.

"I'm lost in admiration," I assured her; all fur and claws, and purr.

Miles and Laurie played with the dogs, and seemed quite human and interested. When tea came, Marguerite asked to pour it out, and of course I said yes. She made a pretty business of it, and I never realized before what dainty dimpled hands she has. I saw Miles looking at them with interest. As for Laurie, it was more difficult to guess his thoughts: but he, too, is a man.

By and by Marguerite began wondering aloud why I had no piano in my boudoir.

"There are one or two in the house," said Miles, "though I'm afraid they're rather old and out of order. She could have had one tuned and brought here, if she'd liked—or, she might have bought a new one."

"Yes, and she certainly *would*, if she loved music as I do," assented Marguerite.

I was mute, though the truth is, I have n't dared to sing lest some echo of my voice reach Miles or Laurie, and recall sad memories. Not that my "twilight voice" could remind them of Helène's, but I have felt that any singing might hurt them; and I was frightened when Marguerite went on: "Do you love music, Sir Miles?" (She did not speak much to Laurie, though she glanced at him often.)

"Yes," Miles answered, quietly, not at all as if the question and answer pained him. Already Marguerite seemed to know him better than I did.

"Would you, I wonder," she began, very sweetly, "care to have me get an old-fashioned, rather common musical instrument that I always carry with me? It's only—I'm half ashamed to tell you, now I've begun—a *banjo*! I sing darkey ballads to it, but *real* ones, not made up 'coon' songs, to rag time."

Miles might have felt bound in politeness to say "yes," but there was sincerity and even eagerness in his tone as he begged her to send for the maligned banjo.

"Do let Timpson go to my room and get it, will you, Sandy?" she asked, rather as if she were afraid of a grim "no." And at last, though my claws were still unsheathed, I did have an impulse to laugh; it was funny to hear the "haughty Lady Ermytrude" way in which she called my old nurse "Timpson." I knew she would n't dare do it to her face, at pain of having her nose snapped off.

Of course, I rang the bell which connected with the maid's room, and mildly asked Miss Timpson to "be so kind," etc. The banjo came and Marguerite sang in her clear soprano, song after song, of my very own special collection. They don't suit her voice as well as they do my low-pitched mezzo, for darkey melodies are born for mezzos or contraltos; and I confess that as I listened, all my naughtiest passions rose again, and boiled. A new emotion as a Christmas present! — but a nasty one. I'm afraid — yes, I am nearly certain — it was jealousy. I began to recognize the thing's ugly features and green eyes while Miles thanked Marguerite, and paid her pretty compliments.

Never has he paid me a compliment, pretty or plain!

There you go, grumbling now, you ungrateful little minx of a Sandy, when you ought to be thanking Heaven that he's well enough in body and mind to enjoy anything! Don't you see what it is? He would be just as agreeable to you if he did n't think you a heartless, ambitious woman, who drove a hard bargain with him: his title and position for your money. As it is, he naturally considers you beyond the pale

of pleasantness, and it's all he can do to be civil. Dr. Henderson was wise to want another girl brought upon the scene. Anything for a change after undiluted doses of me! And who am I, to grudge him a little happiness?

New Year's Day.

Yes, I am jealous — achingly, sickeningly jealous.

How it hurts to be jealous! If jealousy is a sin, it must bring its own punishment. I suppose it's one of the meanest of faults; but I don't *feel* mean, I feel only unhappy, in a dumb, dreadful way. My one consolation is remembering Hans Christian Andersen's story about the little mermaid who sold her tongue to the sea-witch, that she might have legs and feet instead of a mermaid's tail, and so buy a chance to win the prince she loved. *She* was jealous — jealous of the beautiful princess whom her prince took for a bride. She suffered agonies of jealousy, seeing them together on the ship, while the mortal body she'd bought at so great a price dissolved into the foam of the sea. Yet she was not wicked, only piteous. What tears I shed over her in the days when I had no cause to cry for myself! I am sorry for her still, in remembering her fate; and I'm sorry for myself, in brooding over mine.

Marguerite is flirting with Miles, and *he likes it*.

There! The words are written, and I'll let them stand.

He likes it.

Not that he knows he is being flirted with. He would be disillusioned and disgusted, if he knew. All he realizes is that Marguerite is a very pretty girl who

pays him the compliment of taking endless trouble to amuse him in his convalescence. Every day which passes, I understand more thoroughly that his manner to me does n't prove a dislike for women's society, Helène being gone — but merely a distaste for mine, because of what I am in his eyes. He loves to hear Marguerite sing. He talks and even jokes with her. They play chess together. Twice she has proposed driving with him (he won't use the motor-car, which he cruelly calls mine), and he has accepted the invitation. When they come back from their outings they are very cheerful, laughing over little things that have happened; and Miles seems better and younger than before.

I'm not foolish enough to dream that Marguerite is making him forget Helène, but I believe *she* thinks that she is: and I can't help almost hating her for the delight it gives her — not only to win him, but to hurt me. And all the time she pretends, when she and I are alone, that she is only trying to *cheer* Miles for *my* sake, through gratitude for what I've promised her and Lord Burne. She says, when they are married, I must often ask them here. I won't — I *won't!* Yes, but I suppose I will, if Miles wishes it. Although Lord Burne is n't his sort at all, he may tolerate the man for Marguerite's sake.

She calls him "Cousin Miles," and he seems pleased.

Never yet have I dared call him Miles. How he would look at me if I suddenly began! So far we have always been "you" to each other. Generally this form of address works well, unless we need to speak across the room to one another, which is awkward — as one can't bawl, "You! — look here, please, you!" But we contrive to get round the difficulty somehow.

She makes him call her "Marguerite," and he obeys like a lamb with a collar of roses. I do think *men*, even the best ones, are strange. They seem to be *no* judges of women.

By this time Marguerite's earnest study of the "mysterious marriage" must have been rewarded by insight into our family relations. Though her eyes can be soft, they are sharp, and I think that Culver Castle has no longer any secrets from her. She has not only found the skeleton in the cupboard, but counted all its bones.

Sometimes I think that Laurie sees what Marguerite is doing. Yet — when one comes to put it into words — what *is* she doing? She is n't trying to take Miles away from me, because you can't take from people what is not theirs. If Laurie sees the game, it must be amusing him immensely; but — if I happen to catch his eye when Marguerite is flirting her hardest with his brother, there's never a glint of mischievous pleasure to show that he's enjoying a piquant situation. On the contrary, he glares. Probably after all he is thinking of something else.

This morning, when we three were together in Laurie's room, Marguerite went out to fetch some photographs she had taken of the castle. She had on a beautifully becoming dress, and her hair was done in the fashion of day after to-morrow — a little too elaborate for the country — but no matter: men don't know these things.

"Your cousin is one of the prettiest girls I ever saw," Miles remarked. "In this old house she's like a charming modern picture against an old back-ground. Her hair and complexion are wonderful, and her figure —"

"Your wife's could be as good, if she doctored them up the same way," Laurie cut in, to my surprise. I was n't sure whether he were defending or making fun of me, too subtly for my immediate understanding. I felt dazed, as once or twice before, when Miles's illness made him irritable, and Laurie flew out at him for being "cross" with me. Such an accusation would draw an instant apology from Miles to me; and then, the next moment, Laurie would himself say something stinging that lashed the blood into my face.

Miles evidently thought that he was again taken to task. "I have n't said that hers were not as good," he defended himself with a politely bored smile for us both.

"You never do say anything about her, good or bad!" was the retort that Laurie flung at him, waspishly.

Miles looked astonished. "If I've failed in good manners to — my wife, I must beg your pardon," he said coolly. "Thank you for reminding me. But really, I can't see that admiring her cousin is putting a slight upon her. On the contrary, it's a compliment."

"Of course!" I anxiously agreed.

"How you can fall a victim to paint and powder and peroxide passes my understanding," Laurie went on venomously. More and more was I bewildered by him. At first he seemed to admire Marguerite, but for the last few days his manner has certainly changed toward her. I fancied it only a mood, but this sudden outburst was a lurid revelation of revolt. Still, I could hardly believe that I might count upon him as my champion in the lists, and so I was at a loss what to think.

"If to admire Miss Norton is to admire paint,

powder and peroxide, then I do admire them," said Miles, keeping his temper. "At the same time, I'm sure you do her an injustice. I've got eyes in my head, as well as you, my dear boy."

"Have you? Sometimes I doubt it," Laurie snapped at him so sharply that Miles caught him up with a quick, "What do you mean?"

"Nothing you'd understand. I hardly understand myself," grumbled Laurie. And just then Marguerite came back.

Behind her appeared one of the newly imported footmen with a telegram — actually a telegram for me. It was from Lady Meldon, and said, "My invalid is practically well and we are taking it for granted you would like us to wish you happy New Year, as we were prevented accepting invitation wish you Merry Christmas. Starting at once will arrive in time New Year's dinner. Explanation sudden decision when we meet."

I read this aloud, and we were all delighted, except Marguerite, who looked far from pleased. Afterward she said to me that we had been "such a charming *partie carrée*, and now "everything would be spoiled."

Miles, Laurie and we two American interlopers a "charming *partie carrée*!" I wonder if she was in earnest? People are puzzling, lately.

My first sensation on hearing that "Lady Mel" and Mr. Graeme were coming was of pure joy, but soon the joy was darkened. I feared my dear lady's eyes might be too keen: that she might think me looking ill, and say in her heart, "The girl is n't as brave as I hoped. Already she's falling by the wayside. Instead of a ray of sunlight I've given Miles a cloud."

I did want to be a ray of sunlight, or to assume

sunniness if I had it not! . . . And then, there was Mr. Graeme, my avowed champion. No matter what Lady Meldon might think, she would say nothing — before any one. But I could imagine Mr. Graeme blurting out, "Why, what have they been doing to my little friend? She's thin as a rail, and white as a sheet!"

I could n't bear to have Miles's attention drawn to me in that way, as if he were to blame for my pale face, and I began to dread the visit. But suddenly a new idea diverted me from my forebodings.

I recalled Laurie's queer retort to Miles's praise of Marguerite.

"Why *should n't* I 'doctor' myself in the same way?" I thought.

Marguerite has always "painted the lily and gilded fine gold," just the least in the world, ever since she left school. Since Paris, where, as she said, "one feels *dingy* unless one does something to oneself," she has been absolutely dazzling — oh, but *discreetly* dazzling. I should never have supposed a *man* would guess. And Miles's admiration, showing that, despite his sorrow, he can still care for beauty in women, made me at that moment long wildly to be pretty. Just to be looked at by him as if I had a *face*, and not a featureless expanse scarcely recognizable if met unexpectedly in the street, would be something gained!

I wondered if Laurie were right, and that, if I dabbled in a few decorative effects, Miles would think me improved.

"He does n't see that Marguerite makes up," I argued with my commonsense. "And anyhow, he *likes* paint and powder and peroxide, if they account for her beauty!"

I burned to experiment. How nice, I thought, it would be to hear Lady Mel and Mr. Graeme say: "You *are* looking well, my dear!" I pictured a new Me, with marcelled hair, in shining, regular ripples like Marguerite's, instead of my go-as-you-please sort of waves. I saw myself provided with cheeks like roses on a skin of snow, hair a shade more golden, a shade less brown, eyelashes dark in contrast. I could hardly wait to materialize the vision.

As luck would have it, Miss Timpson was violently celebrating New Year with one of her choicest headaches. She usually selects a day of public rejoicing to have one, as if in protest against worldly levity in others. If she had been on the scene, I should never have brought my courage to the rouging point, so mighty a weapon would have been her virtuous disapproval. But I hoped that, once I got the knack, I could afterward do my decorating quickly and neatly in the bathroom, with a locked door between her sharp eyes and my frivolity.

I dared not ask Marguerite to lend any secret aids to beauty. I'm not supposed to know of their existence. What to do, then, in the emergency? Even if there were time, Cæsar's wife could n't dash off in a motor to Kendal and breathlessly demand from some shocked shopkeeper, paint, powder and peroxide. A deceitful suggestion of private theatricals would be useless, for in this part of the world every one knows every one else's business.

Necessity, however, is the mother of invention, as I've had dinned into my ears since childhood. I "concentrated," until I remembered that girls at school used to bring out "golden glints" by washing their hair with soda water and ammonia. As for

curling irons — the poker, like the poor, is always with us! Also I recalled the process of darkening our eyebrows with burnt cork, for school-plays and charades. I gazed earnestly at my nail-salve, in a little silver box on my dressing-table, and saw that it was of a delicious rose color, useful in more ways than one.

I had to wait until Lady Meldon and Mr. Graeme had arrived. The "explanation" of the surprise visit was that he had been somehow worrying about his little friend, with an anxiety almost amounting to a presentiment, and I was to regard him as a knight, coming to my rescue. After they had been welcomed, there was no time to wash my great masses of hair. To do that, with the drying, is half a day's work; but an unsuspecting housemaid was induced to bring me kitchen soda and ammonia. I soused my head in a strong solution of both, and sat on the floor bowing to the fire, till I felt like a roasting apple.

My only powder is of a ricey, nursery character; but on a foundation of cold cream it stuck to my face, and the effect of the pink nail-salve on top enchanted me, especially after eyebrows and eyelashes had been touched up with burnt cork. As for my hair, when thoroughly cooked, it had gained a distinct shade of yellow.

The poker work was not as great a success as the rest, and at first I scorched a lock here and there. But I grew in skill, and in the end the principal drawback was that the soda had so dried my hair, it stood out like a bushy halo, making me look like a kind of sainted Strümpelpeter.

When I was a finished work of art, with my corsets painfully pulled in to fit a smart frock formerly con-

demned as too tight, I would hardly have known myself if we 'd met in a strange mirror. Something about my new personality called for jewelry, so I put on a good deal more than I ever wore at one time before, and did not know whether to think the transformation a surprising success, or a startling failure. Anyhow, whoever I was, I was not Sandy Phayre, so I felt *that* ought to be an improvement in Miles's eyes!

At last, when it was time to go down, suddenly a wave of fright swept over me. I rushed back from the door to the dressing-table, and rubbed off half the bloom from cheeks and lips. This theft of color made my well-powdered features ghastly. With trembling hands I renewed my roses, but devil doubt had got me in his clutches. I feared that one cheek was redder than the other. I shivered lest the black should spatter off my eyelashes. I hoped — I almost prayed — that Miles might not suspect make-up, yet think, "By Jove, after all the girl's quite pretty!" It was a real attack of stage-fright, and when I'd dragged myself to the door of the green drawing-room, where we were to meet before dinner, I had to count ten before I could open it and go in.

Miles and Marguerite had already arrived. He stood with his back to the big fireplace, bending over her to fasten a bracelet which had kindly come undone. She was dressed with unusual simplicity, wore her hair like a debutante's, and had no jewelry but a girlish string of pearls. I knew, then, even before my judges began to judge, that I was meretricious. And as their gaze fixed me, I realized my full guilt. Horror! Long swords seemed to stick out of Miles's eyes and pierce mine. Out of Marguerite's darted nasty sharp hatpins. If I had been a child, unham-

pered by that inconvenient sense of responsibility which comes with growing up, I should have run away, and hidden under a bed or sofa. As it was, gladly would I have exchanged that doorway for the scaffold. It would have been the greatest convenience to have my head lopped off quickly, before Miles and Marguerite had time to be sure what was the matter with it.

"Good gracious! my *dear* Sandy, what have you been doing to yourself?" was my cousin's reassuring welcome.

Miles said nothing, but had the air of a man who bites his lip to keep his tongue in order. The faint gleam of interest which I'd fancied in the morning had faded from his eyes, and left them cold and empty as the northern sea.

"I've put on a dress you have n't seen me wear," I answered Marguerite, diplomatically.

"I don't mean *that*," said she.

"And imitation being the sincerest flattery, I've tried to do my hair like yours," I was driven on, desperately.

"Oh, I hope mine does n't look like that!" Marguerite protested, with cousinly frankness. "Does it, Miles?"

"I don't see much resemblance," he consoled her.

"Sandy!" she broke out at me, her eyes like fish-hooks. "I believe you've got on a *wig*."

Now, nobody knows better than Marguerite that, with the quantities of hair I have, it would be physically impossible to wear a wig, unless I wished my head to look the size and shape of a pumpkin. But Miles has forgotten the night when he kissed my long plaits, believing them Helène's, and said I had the most beautiful hair in the world.

"A wig! What nonsense!" was the only defense I could stutter.

"But it's almost yellow!"

"Effect of light."

"Oh, no, it is n't *that*. Miles do make her tell us what she's been doing to herself. Or is it some joke between you two?"

"Certainly not a joke in which I have any part as yet," Miles replied. "And if she won't mind my expressing an opinion, I should say, if it's a joke, it is not a very good one when — when there are guests in the house. If I might be allowed to suggest, I should say — run upstairs and take it off."

"What — her hair?" asked Marguerite.

"No — er — but perhaps I need n't specify. For her own sake, I'd a little rather Lady Mel and Mr. Graeme — should n't see her like that."

All this to Marguerite, because that convenient handle "You" would n't quite work, and he did n't care to "name" me for the first time in such circumstances. He may have felt that a stern "Sandy!" would have the harsh effect of "naming" a member a Parliament who has been naughty in the House of Commons. I've read of that trick, and pitied the baited wretch, but I never pitied any one in the world more passionately than I pitied myself at that moment.

There seemed nothing to do but go, since obedience was easier than argument. I wished that I could instantly fall dead, as I used to wish as a child, when Aunt Dora scolded me; but as I could call up no symptom of death, or even fainting, I turned and fled. On the way upstairs, just as tears — which felt as large and hot as boiled eggs — began rolling over my face, of course I met Lady Mel and Mr. Graeme.

"My dearest child, what can have happened?" she exclaimed. But to save my life, or other things far more valuable, I could n't stop and be polite.

"Oh, don't a-ask me!" I gurgled; and with my head lowered like an angry young bull, I rushed past them both, stifling roars in a too small handkerchief.

I heard Mr. Graeme shout, "Good Lord, Jeanie, go after her, woman, and see what's the matter!"

But my sweet lady knew better. She murmured something I could not, and needed not to hear, and the two pursued their way downstairs. I was sure she had said "No, the child wants to be alone. It would make things worse if I went back now." And I blessed her unfailing tact.

Into my room I dashed, and whimpering like a hurt baby, began tearing down my hair. I had adorned it with a tiara—a wedding present from home—which I'd never even tried on before. It was my very first personal encounter with a tiara; and, what with blinding tears, trembling hands and a dress tighter than my skin, the thing got mixed up with my hair, like two Chinese puzzles mingling intricately together. I pulled and clawed, sobbing with shame and rage against myself—and a little against Marguerite. Altogether, it was as bad as a dream where you must go out at once to keep an appointment of life or death, and everything combines to prevent you from getting ready. At last, in a fit of fury against my alleged wig, I cut out the tiara, and not only flung it on the floor, but kicked it. Scissors in hand, I caught sight of myself in the glass at this juncture: my face inflamed, smeared with paint, and a strange pattern of spots, done in burnt cork, embroidering my cheeks. In the midst of tears, I burst out laughing—"boo-higgling,"

as I used to call it when I was small. But it was the kind of laugh that hurts.

With my hair on my shoulders, pins still sticking in it, I began to drag, rather than take off my dress. I would sooner have turned into a pollywog (not much change for the worse, judging from appearances!) than have called any one to help me, so I resorted once more to the scissors: and a mutilated wreck of a Paris frock was falling round my feet when somebody tapped.

I trod vengefully on the dress, and answered the summons by sticking my nose through a crack of the door.

"If your ladyship pleases, Edward wishes me to say he has been asked by the butler what's to be done about dinner? Is it to wait, or would your ladyship prefer to have it served?"

I hesitated. In my despair, I had forgotten dinner. If I only knew which Miles would prefer — which of two evils he would consider the less? I pictured his condition of mind. This to happen during our first "house-party," before Lady Mel and Mr. Graeme, his two dearly valued friends! I — ostensibly the mistress of the house — upstairs in a tantrum, and undressed just as dinner was about to be served. What should I do? I could n't possibly get my hair up and make myself even half presentable in less than twenty minutes. As I wavered between cross-eyed Charybdis and flat-nosed Scylla, I heard Sister Sturgis's voice speaking behind the housemaid's back in the corridor.

"Are you there, Lady Culver, please?"

"Yes," I confessed myself, fearing disaster on disaster. But the wind is tempered to shorn lambs. The nurse had only to say that her patient was anxious

to see me on my way down to dinner. I could have thanked her with tears. I was saved!

Snatching this excuse as if it were a whole bundle of straws for a drowning man, I explained to the maid that I must go to Mr. Culver. Sir Miles and our guests would understand, and dinner was to be served without me. My cousin Miss Norton would kindly take my place at the head of the table.

Hastily I decided not to go down at all. I would shelter behind Laurie. Luckily I need n't make myself smart for him! I told Sister Sturgis that I would be with him in five minutes, and began twisting my hair up, anyhow. I washed off the paint, but could not wipe away the signs of tears. Powder made my eyes look redder by contrast, so I abandoned that experiment. And in a plain white tea-gown, hurriedly thrown on, I sought sanctuary in Laurie's room.

I hoped he might be self-absorbed, and not inclined to notice me; but people are seldom in their usual moods if you particularly wish them to be there.

"Are you ill?" he asked rather sharply, from his big sofa, though I had dodged aside in search of a shadow for my nose.

"No," said I. "Only a headache. I — I've excused myself, and am not going down to dinner."

"Something's happened," he persisted. "You may as well tell me what's up, for I'll find out if you don't."

"Nothing contagious, anyhow," I tossed at him, in the flippant way I wear to match his. Only, for a wonder, he was not flippant to-night.

"Who has been making you cry?" he wanted to know.

"My worst enemy. Name is Ego."

"Excuse me if I take that Ego with a grain of salt. The enemy was your cousin — or Miles — or — both."

"My own fault in any case. And I'm delighted to have you as an excuse for not dining."

"I thought I should catch you on the way down, when I sent. But I did n't mean to keep you long."

"Now you see, you can keep me or not, as you choose, like a library book. But in case you find the book tiresome you'd better begin the first chapter."

"I've changed my mind," Laurie said. "There is something I want badly. But I won't tell you, after all, until you've told me why you cried."

"That's absurd!" I argued. "It can't possibly amuse you to hear why I cried."

"I don't happen to want to be amused, only to be interested."

"But it would n't interest any one, except a cruel boy who tortures frogs for the fun of seeing them jump."

"Perhaps I deserve that — from you," he said. "But I'm not as cruel as you think. If I was so once, you've cured me."

"I?"

"Yes, you. Does that strike you as strange?"

"Passing strange."

"Then you have n't studied yourself — or the situation. I've been doing both. If you want to know more, tell me why you cried."

I looked at him curiously, then longingly, for his eyes were astonishingly kind.

"Well, I will tell you, as a punishment to myself," I said at last. "Maybe after all I can make the story a little amusing." And I began the tale of my troubles,

taking the funny point of view. For me, I was really quite witty, and I expected to make Laurie laugh; but he did not even smile. I went on swimmingly, with the description of Sandy Phayre dressing and painting herself to represent a beauty, until I got to the part where the heroine of the story had to show herself at the drawing-room door.

"Was n't I a *blooming* idiot?" I tried to laugh; but the memory of my sufferings overcame me, and I gave vent to a weird sound which was a cross between a sob and a howl.

"Poor little girl," Laurie muttered.

I was so surprised, I could hardly believe I'd heard aright. I stared questioningly. "That look shows me what a beast I've been to you," said he. "I *was* a beast — deliberately. I thought you deserved it, which shows that I was fool and beast in one. As for Miles, he's blind. Sometimes I'm tempted to open his eyes. But I stop to think — and it seems as if I were n't the right one to do it. Not yet, anyhow. By and by, perhaps. And that's connected with what I wanted to tell you, before you could get down to the dining-room this evening. You've earned the information now."

I waited.

"There was a sort of warning I wanted to give you. Lady Mel came to see me, you know, before dressing for dinner. I put her up to saying a certain thing to Miles, and I was anxious you should help her out. Of course, you've heard that Miles was offered the command of Astra, and that he asked leave to think it over?"

"Yes, I heard," I said, "not from him. He's never mentioned the subject."

"I suppose you know, too, or else you've guessed, that he's got an extension of time to decide. The government is anxious for him to accept, because he's a big man and ought to have a big reward, which he never has had yet. This job on the Mediterranean is the best they've got to give at present, or may have for years. They're simply keeping the place warm for Miles till he makes up his mind, though he offered to throw over the chance once and for all, so they could hand on the billet to some one else. I know he worries, keeping them waiting — though they insisted on his taking time: and it's all my fault. He's hanging on 'till Laurie gets well.' He won't say to himself, 'or till Laurie dies.' I want Lady Mel to persuade him to accept definitely now, agreeing to take up the command in two months' time."

"Oh, but —" I began, only to be cut short.

"That's the way Lady Mel started in. I convinced her that there is no 'but.' In less than two months the obstacle will cease to exist."

"Of course, you'll be much better, we hope; but you might n't be *quite* well enough for Miles to think —"

"I shall be well enough to have solved the Great Secret. Don't you realize that?"

"No — no!" I stammered. "You must n't speak of —"

"Why not?" he asked, quietly, his great eyes calm as dark, still pools. "It's true. I don't mind, any more. And it'll be rather a relief to talk freely to you sometimes. I never shall to Miles. He cares too much."

"I care, too," I whispered.

"I believe you do! But don't look like that, and,

for heaven's sake, don't cry again! I'm not worth your tears. Besides, they make a coward of me. I don't want to turn coward now. To go on with what I was saying: I sent for you, to ask if you'd back Lady Mel up in persuading Miles, without showing surprise at her arguments. I hoped to get at you beforehand — but I'm glad you're here with me, to-night. I've got worked up to an idiotic state of nerves, seeing Lady Mel, and — your presence is curiously comforting."

"Thank you for telling me that," I said. "I, too, am 'worked up.' It's soothing to be here, knowing you like having me. Oh, the joy of being *wanted*! It's like warming cold hands at a bright fire."

He laughed. "A queer pair of pals, are n't we?"

"Very queer. But you always called me queer."

"That was because I kept finding you so different from what I expected. Do you know what I've come to think you?"

"Tell me — if we're pals — real pals."

"I think you're the bravest, truest, loyalest, most wonderful little woman in the world."

"Oh, Laurie!" I cried. "Can you possibly be in earnest? You *are* giving me a happy New Year after all — except for what you say about yourself."

"Don't be conventional. If you're truly my friend, you'll see that being past hope of health and strength, the next best thing is death — speedy and painless. I think it will be both. But not a word to Miles."

"Oh, I should n't dare, even if I wished to speak," I assured him. "Miles could n't bear it from me."

"Lady Mel's going to prepare him a bit, but forbid him to talk with me, on pain of making me worse. All that we'll leave till the last. I stick to my old plan

of putting off what's disagreeable. Why not? And I've begun to consider things from Miles's point of view. That's a change for the better in me, is n't it? At first I considered only myself. No one else seemed to matter. Until Miles's illness, I had moods still when I almost hated him for being well and strong, while I was broken — broken to pieces."

"He was broken, too," I could n't help saying. "His heart was broken."

"I thought mine was, till I began to realize that a broken back makes every other kind of break seem paltry in comparison. Look here, my queer new friend — late enemy — have n't you been tempted to tell Miles that — that the one he broke his heart for was n't worth — I mean, that she did n't love him as he loved her?"

"Never," I answered, emphatically. "The best thing for him is to keep his ideal. It's all he has to live for — that, and the memory of his love."

"Best for him, maybe. But are n't you human? Don't you think of yourself?"

"I think first of him," I confessed, "because he's so incomparably more important than I am. And it's no credit to me to feel that, I assure you."

"No credit!"

"You see, it is n't as if my telling him about *her* would make him love me. On the contrary! And I had n't the slightest hope of his love, from the first. He would never have *looked* at me (even if he'd not met and worshiped *her*) if it had n't been for —"

"For what?"

"Nothing. Nothing I can speak of — or even make clear — to you."

"Don't put me off like that. I ask you for the

second time, but in a different way and different circumstances — why did Miles marry you?"

"Please — oh, please, let us not bring up that subject again, to-night of all nights."

"But who knows — there may n't be many other nights to come. And I can't bear to go, with the mystery unsolved. Since the night Miles was delirious, and I saw and heard everything, and you told me you cared for him, I've asked myself that question: why did he marry you? I shall be driven — by and by — to haunt you, if you won't tell me now."

"I shan't fear to have you read the secrets of my heart by and by."

"Why fear it now? What you tell a man on the edge of the grave is like something told in a confessional. But I'll ask a different question — easier perhaps to answer. Why did *you* marry Miles?"

"I — wanted to."

"Did you care for him before you were married, or learn to care afterward? Not that he's given you much reason!"

"I — cared always. Oh, it was silly, I know, but now that we're — friends, perhaps you can understand. As a child, I had him for my hero; and when — no, I can't go on! I am too ashamed."

"Why ashamed?"

"Because it's a shame when a girl loves a man who could never love her."

"Yet he married you."

"For a good and noble reason."

"Was it that he found out you were in love with him, and pitied you?"

"No, no, *much* more noble even than that. He could n't have brought himself to marry me, if he'd

guessed that I cared for him. And he could n't bear his life now, if he suspected. For heaven's sake, don't so much as hint. It would be terrible — cruel to us both. Secret for secret. I keep yours. You will keep mine."

"Do you mean you'd tell in revenge?"

Perhaps in self-defense I ought to have let him think me capable of treachery, but I could not.

"No," I said. "Nothing that you or any one could do, would make me tell."

"I was sure of you. Well, you may be sure of me."

"Thank you."

"You need n't! You owe me small thanks for anything, God knows. We've tortured you here pretty skilfully, Miles and I. For you, Culver Castle must be the Castle of the Inquisition. And I've been thinking that your big secret is n't impossible to guess — I mean the secret of Miles's 'nobility' in marrying you. If it were n't for your money, should we have got Von Waldhausen here from Berlin — and should I have had a lot of things which I lacked at first and grumbled at lacking? If there's a debt of thanks owing, it's not from you to me. I did n't know you were an heiress, till your cousin came."

"How *horrid* of her to tell!" I snapped, viciously.

"Yes, it was — or the way she did it. She referred to herself as the 'poor relation,' but if she was bidding for sympathy, she did n't get it — at least, from me. Yet I'm glad to have heard the truth. I should n't like to die, with you believing me an ungrateful swine. I begin to see — many things. And if there were anything I could do for you in return, I'd like to do it. Is there anything?" He looked at me closely.

"Don't speak of a 'return'!" I entreated him.

"Whatever I may have belongs to Miles. Anything done for you is done by *him*."

"Still, are you sure there's nothing I can do for you? Think a little, and answer me now; for who can tell — there may never again come a chance like this."

Something deep and mysterious in his eyes said there was a definite thing that he wished to do. I shivered faintly, I did not know why. It was as if a cold wind from a dark valley blew over my soul. But there was no time for his will to print upon my mind the desired words, for a tap at the door made us both start, almost guiltily. Laurie frowned; but when Lady Meldon showed herself on the threshold, the vexed scowl was smoothed away from his forehead.

"Dear Sandy," she said, "I knew I should find you here." Involuntarily I sprang up, like a hunted thing, afraid that Miles and Mr. Graeme, perhaps even Marguerite, might be following on her heels. She saw my wild glance at the door, and without seeming to notice it, or my tear-stained face, she went on quietly.

"Your cousin didn't mind my leaving her. She has a letter to write, or something. And Miles and my brother are still at the table."

I sat down again, and we three talked together as if nothing had happened to break the peace of the evening. Soon Lady Mel had charmed my shamed self-consciousness away; and it was she who gave me a "cue" by which she hoped to save me from the eyes of the two men. "You look a little tired, dear," she said. "If I were you I should run away to bed, so as to be fresh and bright to-morrow; for we want to have you with us from morn till dewy eve, my brother

and I." She was more than usually affectionate, making me feel that I had dear friends, that I was loved and valued. I fled, with her kiss warm on my cheek; and the New Year's night that had begun so badly would have finished almost happily, if it had not been for one last incident.

I was hurrying to my own part of the house, when I met Miles.

"I was on my way to you," he said.

We both stopped, confronting each other, I with my eyes down to hide their redness if I could, for he had paused under a hanging lamp. I had nothing to say, so I waited for him to go on, which he did after an uneasy pause. "I — want to beg your pardon."

"What for?" I asked, awkwardly, in surprise that was partly fright.

"For this evening. I was tactless and — worse. I'm sorry."

"Please don't be," I said. "There's nothing you need be sorry for. It's only I who should have regrets."

"But I am sorry," Miles insisted. "I hope I should have been sorry of my own accord, sooner or later. Still, I'm bound to confess that it was Graeme who showed me to myself as I really am — a grim brute, not fit to be trusted with a woman — particularly such a woman as he thinks you. You have a sincere admirer in him."

"Oh!" I exclaimed, desperately. "He means well, but I wish, oh, I *do* wish — he had held his tongue! I don't thank him for interfering."

"I do," said Miles, "for showing me forcibly the error of my ways, not only in this instance, but others.

Good-night. And again — forgive me for being the extraordinary combination Graeme has invented: a 'black griffin' and a 'bull in a china-shop.' "

"I should like to box Mr. Graeme's ears!" I flashed out, ungratefully, and then, for the second time that night, ran away.

January 7th.

Dear Lady Meldon has gone, with her brother, and we have had no intimate talk. It is better so. There are things that cannot be spoken. But her soft, bright eyes, her kind hands gently pressing mine, said more than words. They told me of her constant love, and recalled my courage. My eyes answered that if I no longer hoped, at least I did not regret, and that I would not if I could, go back along the way she helped me choose.

Poor loyal old Mr. Graeme! A thousand times I've regretted what I said to Miles; and because there was no better way of atoning, I was nicer to him than before. That made him like me better; and his compliments, purposely paid in the hearing of Miles, shamed me every hour.

Now it is all over. They have gone; and Marguerite has gone. I am alone with the two brothers; and Miles, my husband, seems more a stranger than my new-found "pal."

I know Lady Meldon broke it to Miles that Laurie has given up hope of getting well, but he has said nothing to me, perhaps nothing even to Laurie. Yet Laurie knows what is in his heart. He, who is near death, and I who stand alone in life, feel things in some mysterious way without being told them.

January 9th.

Miles has sent for the London specialist who first operated on Laurie, after the accident. And oh, it was dreadful that he should feel it his duty to consult me, because of the "expense"! I could hardly bear to listen when he said, "If you don't think it will be too expensive." I wanted to stop my ears and cry, but I did n't. I was quite calm on the outside, and answered, "Of course nothing could be too expensive." So the London man will come and "consult" with Dr. Henderson.

I am so sorry for Miles, in his silent sorrow, that I seem to be just one throbbing mass of pity. But I dare not show what I feel.

January 12th.

All hope is over. It is agreed that he cannot live — poor Laurie, who fought for the youth and strength that he loved!

No one knows how long he may last. It may be months, it may be a year, or it may be no more than a few weeks. There will come a day — or a night — when his tired heart will stop, without pain. For it is a tired heart now. Since he has known that he can never be as he once was, he has ceased wishing to be, at all.

Dr. Henderson told me the result of the consultation; and then Laurie sent for me. Miles I have n't seen for three days.

A presentiment lies heavily on my heart that now Laurie has given up trying to live, he will die soon.

I don't think I shall find much comfort in reporting to my Breviary, now that I've only sad things to

record. When there were some that had a funny, as well as a dark side, there was pleasure in putting them on paper. Often, while writing, I contrived to laugh, though I felt more like crying when the things I wrote about happened. But it is not so with me now. There's no echo of laughter anywhere.

What will Miles do when Laurie — no, I can't write that word! I don't want to ask myself the question, and there is no answer of which I have the courage to think.

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January 29th.

I was just going to bed last night — *the 28th* — a night I shall never forget — when I heard a far-off-sounding knock. I knew at once that it was on the door of the ante-room which shuts my suite away from the corridor.

It was late. I'd been reading, and had sent Miss Timpson to bed, not to feel guilty keeping her at my beck and call. I jumped up and went to the door, opening it softly, fearing to wake her, if she had dropped into her first sleep. Sister Dallas, Laurie's night nurse, stood looking like a ghost in the dim, grayish light. Before she spoke, I knew why she had come.

"Is he —" I began; but my voice broke. It sounded very strange in my own ears.

"He wants you to come," she said. "It may be the end. He thinks so, and we've sent for Dr. Henderson. All feeling has gone from his hands and arms. It's just as if they were dead; and there's a difficulty in breathing. He says, will you hurry, please."

Quickly I slipped on a dressing-gown. My hands were cold, and stiff so that I had difficulty in fastening it. I thought of Laurie's hands, that were "as if dead," and a chilly sickness crept through my veins. Sister Dallas had not waited for me. She ran back, when she had told me the news, and I had no time to think of asking if Sir Miles were with his brother. I was not three minutes getting ready, and I hurried as she had begged me to do. The house was still, yet it seemed an awed stillness rather than the sleeping silence of other nights. Though it was one o'clock the lights in the corridors had not been put out, or else they had been relighted.

Outside the door of Laurie's room stood Sister Sturgis. Evidently she had been kept up, or waked, for as a rule she went to bed about eleven, when the night nurse came on duty. Sister Dallas was with her, and I looked from one to the other, surprised that both should be there together.

"We've been sent out of the room," Sister Sturgis said. "Sir Miles is there — was sent for just before you. He was tired and had gone to bed early, as Mr. Culver seemed very well at that time, and thought he could sleep. It was after midnight when the change came. He's talking to Sir Miles now."

"Then had n't I better wait here," I began, "until —"

"No," the nurse cut me short. "He gave us instructions to send you in the moment you came, but for you not to speak until he's finished what he has to say, as his time may n't be long. Whatever it is, he wants you to hear — just you and his brother."

Noiselessly she opened the door, and noiselessly I went into the room where Laurie lay, slightly propped

up in bed. It was only the second time I had ever been there. Usually when I visited him, it was in the sitting-room adjoining, where I often brought a chair near his big sofa by the fire.

The bed stands facing the door; and softly as I went in, his eyes turned to me. Instantly, however, they went back to Miles, who was leaning forward, elbows on knees, face hidden in hands, sitting on a chair by the bedside. I saw him so, only in profile, and he did not stir as I entered. I knew that he had not heard me; and I thought, as Laurie went on speaking, that he did not wish me to let Miles know I had come. I stopped by the door, and stood perfectly still. I felt guilty at being there, unseen by Miles, as if I were an intruder, an eavesdropper; but this was Laurie's hour, and his will must be supreme. His brother would wish that, and my scruples were of no importance.

Where I stood, leaning weakly against the wall, I was in shadow. The only lights in the room were near the bed, and even they were dim: one green-shaded lamp on the medicine-table; and another, green-shaded also, on a stand at the left side, where the books were kept which Laurie sometimes read at night. The large, old-fashioned bed was a greenish-white island rising out of a shadow-sea; and Laurie's beautiful face and dark head, propped up on pillows, seemed strangely etherealized — almost magical, like the reflection of some pale flower in a still pool at dawn.

Miles's face I could not see — only the brown, bent head, nobly shaped, and the strong, sunburned hands that hid his eyes.

"When I've told you the rest that I've got to say,"

Laurie went on, with a slight laboring of the breath, "you 'll be glad to have me die."

"Never," Miles answered, in a stifled voice. "I can't spare you, Laurie. You cannot dream what my love has been always for you, or you would n't say that. There 's nothing I could n't forgive you."

"Wait, you don't know. I could n't have told you this, if I weren't sure I was going to-night. Just because you do love me, and I could n't bear to live in the same house with you when I 'd killed your love, I 'd have risked hell-fire rather than tell you or have any one else tell till now."

As he said these words, with that labored breath which stopped mine in sympathy, his eyes turned once more to me, and left me again quickly. But with a leap of the heart I knew what I had been brought to hear. I stretched out my arms to him in agonized silent protest, but he would not see.

"Even now it's hard to speak," he went on. "You're not to move, Miles — you're not to look at me, unless you want to kill me before my moment comes. I could n't tell what I have to tell with your eyes on me. Keep them hidden as they are, till I give you leave to uncover them. And don't interrupt. I might n't be able to go on, if you did — and I must go on. Once, I meant never to let you know. I thought nothing would induce me to confess this thing. I made myself believe it would be better not, even for your sake — and that I had no right, anyhow, because — some one else besides myself was concerned. It was only when you were ill a few weeks ago, I began to see that was all selfishness — and cowardice. I had an example — an unexpected example — in courage. But even then I was n't sure

I could — bring myself to do this. Up to New Year's night, I was n't sure. Something happened that night though, that made me sure. And because I was going out of your life, I saw it would n't be so hard to tell as it had seemed before I knew for certain that my call had come — to pass on."

If only I could have stopped him! If only, without breaking in, I could have made him feel, as I felt, that he would do harm and not good to Miles, by confessing! I tried to will him with all my might to feel this, before it was too late; but his soul refused to hear the cry of mine. It was *this* I felt — that he refused to hear, not that he could not hear.

The tired voice labored on.

"You said, just now, that I did n't dream what your love for me was. It's true, I did n't — until all this happened. And my being a cripple, and your devotion, was n't enough to show me. I did n't think much about you. Myself — the horror that was on me — filled the world. Just as I used to do, since I was a child, I took you and everything you did for me pretty much for granted. I did n't even notice that you were breaking down, till the night you were ill and delirious. I know you're wanting to interrupt me now, and ask how I knew you were delirious. You want to say, nobody had a right to tell. Nobody did tell. I heard it myself. I made them carry me to your door, and I sat just outside, in my chair, and listened. Your wife was there with you, Miles. But you did n't know her. You — mistook her for — another woman. And you talked — you told your love to that other woman. It came on me then, how you'd suffered, and how you'd borne up for my sake, till the last blow fell, and broke down your self-control.

I know what that blow was. Your wife told me. I forced her to tell, how Helène's picture came, a miniature — and you opened the parcel. I made her give me the miniature. And now — I'm going to confess to you why I wanted it. Keep your eyes hidden, Miles! I loved Helène — not as a sister. And she loved me. Oh, God, I know how it hurts you! But you've got to know everything, just as it was. We were both traitors to you. There's no excuse except our love. And we made ourselves think all was as fair in love as war. But yes — there's this excuse. I told Helène I loved her, the same day you spoke to her. She didn't know then that she cared enough to make big sacrifices for my sake. You see, she was ambitious. She wanted to marry greatness. You were the right man, I was the wrong one. It didn't so much matter my having nothing — she had money and could make money, if she were allowed to go on singing. It was my *being* nothing — you so much, that fought for you and against me. Only, you wanted her to leave the stage. She couldn't decide. She made you give her a few days to think it over. Meanwhile I pleaded. We had a code of signals between us — flowers. I'll never forget the day you would have me to go with you both to Lady Mel's, to tell of your engagement. I hated you that day, Miles. I could have killed you. When I knew that she was for you, not me, I wanted her a hundred times more than ever. And with her, it was the same. The moment after she'd promised you, she realized that it would be hard to give me up. She gave me a white rose that day in Chelsea. A white rose, in our code, meant '*wait*.' I didn't know what to think of it — or whether she'd forgotten the mean-

ing we attached to it. But she had n't forgottén. When a chance came, she told me that — she was n't sure whether she could part from me. After that, I never let her alone for an hour. I begged — I implored — I threatened to shoot myself on her wedding-day, if she married you. The night after I made that threat she pretended to be ill, and let her understudy sing Carmen. She was supposed to be in bed. You were n't allowed to see her. The truth was, she slipped out of the house to go with me, in her own motor-car. Only the chauffeur knew. We talked things over. I got her to say she 'd throw you over. But next day she changed her mind. Then she changed back again. I was never sure of her, one way or the other, for twenty-four hours. She nearly drove me mad. I hardly knew whether I loved or despised her most. But at last I felt that somehow I 'd got a tighter hold upon her; and — well, the day she was killed and I was smashed, we — were running away together. If we 'd got through, she 'd have been my wife that night. We 'd have lain low in France until the scandal blew over. She knew the public would forgive her — and I — did n't care a hang what anybody thought. That's all, Miles. If you can't forgive, get up, now, and go out of the room without looking at me. Let me die in peace."

I felt as if I too were dying, as Miles rose slowly from his chair. His head was down. His hands, that had fallen from his eyes, hung at his sides, the fingers clenched. I did not know what he was going to do. Perhaps he was too dazed to know clearly himself. He turned half away from Laurie, who lay motionless and silent, watching; and so turning, he faced me, as I pressed my body against the wall, in the shadow by the door.

"Oh, God, don't let him see me!" I prayed.

It seemed the only thing to hope for now the sword had fallen; that he need not know my eyes had seen the wound. If only he would turn again to Laurie without first looking up, I resolved to try and slip quietly out of the room. The one thing to be thankful for, in the disaster which wrecked him for the second time, was that Laurie had left my name out of the story. If I could escape, now, Miles need never be shamed by the knowledge that I knew how he had been tricked. I prayed with all there was of me, for this; but my wish was not to be granted.

For a few seconds, punctuated with my heart-throbs, Miles stood still, head bent, hands clenched, as if a great battle were being fought within him. Then, abruptly he flung up his head, his eyes raised unseeingly, as if he too were praying. Slowly, knowledge of outer things seemed to drift back to him, as if, in the dark desolation of his spirit, a light began to glimmer. I knew by his face that he would forgive Laurie, and that he would turn, in an instant more, to tell him so. In that instant, all danger would have been over: but as his eyes came back to life they found me, in the shadow. The angel-look, of forgiveness triumphing over passion, was dashed from his face like a beautiful mask. A flame of anger swept his pallor away.

"You!" he said. "You have stood there, and heard everything. I could not have thought you capable of this!"

"Forgive me, Miles!" I stammered. "I will go."

"Not yet," Laurie cried out in a voice which suddenly gained strength. "I knew she was here. I made her come. I made her stay—made her be

silent. It was due to her that she should be here. Miles, she *knew*. She saw Helène in my arms, the night the understudy played Carmen, and Helène drove with me in the car. She could have told you everything, but she never spoke."

"Why?" the question rang out sharply.

"Because she's a woman in ten thousand. At first I thought she'd told you, and induced you to marry her, as a bribe to keep the secret. I accused her of that; but when she looked me straight in the eyes and said she had not spoken one word of what she knew, I — believed her. Nobody could have helped who heard, or saw her face. She would never have told you, after my death. I'm sure of that. I got her promise to be silent, before I changed my mind, and while I still wanted you not to know. But even if I had n't asked the promise, she would not have told you. Can you guess why?"

"Laurie, I beg!" I implored him.

"Because she thought you would be happier in ignorance, and she wished for your happiness. But it has come to me that if there's any chance of happiness for you, it lies in knowing. I can't atone. Perhaps you can't forgive. But I'll die having done my best, at the last, to — to — save —" As his voice broke, the ice in Miles's heart melted. With a sob such as I pray never again to hear from any man, he fell on his knees beside the bed.

"I forgive you and Helène. Don't leave me alone, Laurie," I heard him say. Then noiselessly I tiptoed from the room, meeting Dr. Henderson, who had just come and was hurrying along the corridor. But I did not speak. I could not; and when he saw my face, he let me pass without a word.

So it was that I did not see Laurie die.

It was an hour later when one of the nurses came to tell me that he had gone.

February 4th.

Yesterday was the funeral. I did not go, for I have been rather ill, and Miss Timpson has watched over me like a mother-hawk. I suppose hawks can be mothers, and love their young, though one hears nothing of their family life?

Not once since Laurie died have I seen Miles, but he has sent inquiries — polite inquiries — for my health: and the news I have had of him is, that he is “keeping up wonderfully.” I don’t know how we shall bear ourselves when we meet again, as I suppose sooner or later we shall have to meet. Sometimes I wonder if he is expecting me to write, and say that I will go away, for the thought that he sacrificed himself to me in vain must be maddening, now that Laurie is gone. I think and think what to do, and wait for something to happen, which may teach me what is best. But nothing does happen.

Out of doors there is a white world. I can look down from my windows over the Italian garden, and away to the park, where the trees are carved in marble, standing motionless in austere and lovely groups. Even the sky is white, shot faintly with rose and gold at sunset, like mother o’ pearl. The servants say that there has not been so much snow seen for many years. And now Laurie — all that I knew of him — is lying under it, as cold, as white as the marble statue-trees.

I saw him after he was dead. Sister Sturgis came

and fetched me. It was after I wrote last. He was wonderfully beautiful, with a look I never saw on any face: a look of radiant peace and joy as if he had gone to sleep lulled by sweet music, and closed his eyes upon some vision of great joy. The nurses tell me that people always wear that expression when they are dead, even those who die a violent death, or one of great suffering. If at first there is a dark shadow of horror or pain, it goes in a little time, and this magical, *shining* look takes its place. Miss Timpson, too, says this is true of the dead. She has "closed many eyes," she boasts, "before my day." But I never saw any one who was dead, until now. They thought I was too young to see my father.

How I dislike that word, "dead." I ought n't to have written it. It is so little-minded, so short-sighted, to use such a word in thinking of those who go out of this world into a wider life.

I wish Miles had some one who could comfort him a little. He has many friends, and they say quantities of telegrams have poured in. Lady Meldon wired to us both, asking if we would like to have her here, but Miles answered that she must understand if he said no. I am sure she did understand — or nearly. But I wish he had let her come.

Will many more days go on like this, I wonder? If they do, shall I take it as a sign that I had better offer to go, and take myself out of his life?

Later.

I had written thus far, when a note was brought to me from Miles. It said only, "Can you see me, and if so, will you let me come to your sitting-room? There

is something that must be talked over. Don't trouble to write; send a 'Yes,' or 'No,' by the bearer of this." But it is the only letter I have had from him since our marriage and I shall keep it always, folded between these pages of my Breviary. A few minutes later, he came. I had hardly time to dread the meeting, for I felt confused, and physically frightened, like a child.

I stood up, and went toward him a few steps, mechanically; then, the thought of my last sight of him as he fell on his knees by Laurie's bed, and the sound of that tearing sob, overcame me in a curious, sudden way. My heart felt as if it were turning to water. A queer faintness crept over me. I grasped at the arm of the grandfather-chair I had left. Everything turned black for an instant, black as the mourning dress I had put on for Laurie. But I shut my eyes for a second or two, and that made me better. When I opened them again, Miles had come nearer, and was looking at me anxiously. I thought he had put out a hand as if to support me, and then had let it drop.

"I — I have n't been very well," I excused myself.

"I know," he said. "I'm sorry."

And so the worst of the ordeal was got over. We had met, and our eyes had met, and I was glad that I'd nearly fainted. If I had tried, I could n't more tactfully have relieved the strain of the situation.

"And you?" I asked.

"I am well, thank you. Won't you sit down again?"

"Yes. And you — please."

He took a chair on the other side of the fire, and for a minute did not speak. Then he said: "You're very pale — and thin, too, I think. Or is it the effect

of the black dress? I — did n't expect, somehow, to see you in black."

"I hope you don't mind?" It flashed over me that he might think it a liberty for me to put on deep mourning, as if Laurie were my own brother.

"Of course not. I don't know why it had n't occurred to me. It was for you to decide."

"I never liked the idea of mourning," I ventured. "On principle, I mean, I used to think it a kind of insult to the other world, where *they* are, as much as to say this world was better. But I see now why people want to be in black. One could n't bear the sight of oneself in bright colors."

"He had grown to — value you," Miles said, in a voice that tried to be hard, and cold, like a shield to cover a wound. I felt that some other word had been on his lips, which he could not bring himself to say.

"I — loved him," I almost whispered. "Yet I don't wish him back."

"I can't bring myself to talk of it — please," he said, sharply. "There are things I ought to say to you, perhaps — you may be able to guess — but —"

"I beg you 'll say nothing," I implored. "I could n't bear it any better than you could."

"Things I should ask your pardon for," he began again; but again I cut him short. "Don't — don't!" I cried. And he was silent, his eyes fixed on the fire, broodingly; yet they were not so utterly despairing as I had pictured them. He looked sad, and very tired, but he had not changed as much as I had feared. In the nights since Laurie died I had lain awake sometimes, shaking with the cold of dreadful thoughts: that he might kill himself now that he had lost his

ideal, with everything else he loved. But I might have known that he was too strong a man to turn coward under torture.

We sat there, one on each side of the fireplace, motionless and silent. But at last he spoke.

"We must decide about the future. You know I've been offered the command at Astra?"

"Yes," I answered.

"They gave me time to decide. Now there's nothing to wait for any longer. I shall accept. In six weeks I shall leave England. The question is —" He paused, and then went on slowly: "The question is, What do you wish to do? Will you go with me, or would you prefer —" He paused again.

What could I do but finish the sentence as I thought he most desired?

"Oh, I will go home to America — to California."

He looked up quickly from his study of the fire, to study my face. "Is that what you really prefer?"

My heart was no longer water, but had with singular and unpleasant dexterity transformed itself into a large, heavy, cold-boiled beet, soaked in vinegar of a corroding quality.

"Yes," I said, steadily, anxious to get it over and relieve him of suspense. "Yes, that will be quite the best thing for me. You can go away freely, unhampered; and I shall be happier at home than anywhere. You know California is 'home' for me. I have lots of friends there. They'll be glad to see me. And I — shall be glad to see them."

"You are sure you would n't like to try the life at Astra, at least for a little while? It's an interesting place, very eastern, different from anything you've

known, I should think. And a military garrison might amuse you."

I thought it wonderfully noble and unselfish of him to argue against his own interests, in favor of mine. There was a horrid, choky feeling in my throat as I answered, for the longing to take him at his word was almost irresistible. But the time had come to relieve him of the burden which no longer had its uses in mitigating its own dead weight. "Don't be a selfish pig," I said to myself, and tried to brace my spirit by thinking of Lady Mel, in the strength and sweetness of a perfect woman.

"Oh, I have seen something of garrison life," I chirped, like a sparrow giving points to an eagle about high flights. "We've got the Presidio quite near, at San Francisco, and I used to know nearly everybody there. I often went to see parades and things, and to dances."

Still, Miles was unselfishly reluctant to see the mole bury itself in the earth. "Perhaps," he said, "it would be even more interesting at Astra, because you would be the most important woman there. You'd have no gayeties of course, while you're in mourning. But afterward, there'd be a good many; and always there would be visiting Royalties to entertain, if you care for that sort of thing, in a very charming house called 'The Monastery,' which would be — ours. It's several centuries old, and has a famous garden. It was a real monastery once, long ago."

"It's very good of you to be willing to take me," I said, trying not to let my voice sound greedily wistful, "but I'm sure it will be better — all around — for me to go home. I — I'd rather, really."

I added this, because experience of Miles has shown

me how obstinately conscientious he can be in his treatment of me. The few times when he has lost his temper a little, or been goaded by some maladroitness of mine into showing slight irritation, don't count in the least. I remember them only against myself, not against him.

"Very well," he agreed, gravely. "I want you to do what will make you happiest. Among my many regrets, one of the sharpest is that you, who have done much for me and — mine, have not been enough considered. If you want to go home, instead of to Astra with me, you must go. I've no right and no wish to coerce you in any way."

I knew well that he had no wish to coerce me in this particular way. About the "right," that was a different matter; but it did not need discussing.

"You must forgive me if I've seemed too urgent," he went on. "I felt it was only my duty to show you that you might be missing something of interest by going to America. Although, of course, you can always change your mind and come out to me later if you choose."

"Thank you," I said, turning my face a little away from him, pretending absorption in a worm-hole in the old, carved oak chair. "But — once I'm back in California, I — I think it will be too hard to tear myself away again, for long."

I felt his eyes fixed so intently upon me that I had to give up my researches in the worm-hole, and face him boldly.

"Do you mean," he asked, "that — you want to leave me — for good?"

"I thought, you see," I answered in a low voice, "we might manage without any gossip. I would n't

have that for the world! It would do you harm, I know. But this is what I was planning: I was sure you'd go away from England soon, and nobody would think it strange if — if I waited till then, and when you had gone to Astra, sailed for America, to make a long visit. It could be put into the papers like that, if it would do any good: 'a long visit to relatives at home.' Nobody would think it queer, especially as Marguerite is going to be married in June. Every one will hear of the wedding, as she's marrying an Englishman — Lord Burne."

"Oh, I'm not worrying about what people may say!" Miles exclaimed, rather impatiently. "It's only — but after all, what use talking, if you want to go?"

"It would be *horrid* to have gossip, just when you're taking up this new command," I said. "But you think with me that there won't be any if we arrange it in this way, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, I think with you," he echoed, with an odd bitterness in his voice that I could n't understand. But I put it down to some blunder of mine, which I was n't delicate-minded enough to see.

"By and by people will forget all about me," I assured him, almost eagerly. "Maybe, after awhile, they'll come to believe I've died, or something. You know what people are — the kind we call our friends — they're so busy with their own affairs, they forget those of others, if nothing interesting happens to jog their memories, as time goes on. So it will be in our case. I shall stay on the other side, and gradually moss will grow over me — as far as the outside world is concerned. Perhaps you'll be able almost to forget me, too."

Miles laughed out, a short, hard laugh. "That will be rather difficult."

"You think so now, but time heals wounds," I tried to console him. "Anyhow, I do hope you'll try to forget the most boring things."

"The most boring things! Such as —?"

"Oh, I know only too well that they've been too many to specify," I laughed, "though in self-defense I must say I've done what I could not to be troublesome. Only there were so many things that could n't be helped."

"I see you are sarcastic!" he said.

"Then you see wrong! I mean it — naturally. I'm being quite frank."

"You will at least stay till I leave for Astra?" he inquired, stiffly.

"Yes, of course. In six weeks I can make all my arrangements beautifully. I'll engage rooms at the hotel in San Francisco where I used to live with Aunt Dora and Marguerite. They have sailed now, and will go back there till Marguerite's marriage. But I don't want to bother you about such details. I shall be *quite* all right."

"I can't pay you back the money which I've spent on poor Laurie — not on myself, as you know, thank God!" he broke out, with suppressed fire. "Or what you've put into the place here, meaning Culver at that time, I suppose, to be your home. But I can and will countermand the restorations that were to begin this spring."

"Oh, don't do that!" I begged him. "I love Culver Castle so. And" — thinking quickly — "if you don't object, I might like to run over here for a few weeks, sometimes, if you were away, and if the place were restored."

"Very well," he agreed. "If it's for your own personal comfort and pleasure, spend what you choose, but only on such things as you want done for your own sake. And when I can pay you back what has been taken from your fortune for my brother, I will do it."

"You are very cruel!" I stammered, not able to keep the tears from leaking into my voice.

"Cruel! What do you mean?"

"I loved Laurie. I learned to love him. Are you going to take from me the joy of knowing that I was able to be of a little use to him?"

"I should be very sorry to take from you any joy, even the smallest," he said. "I have done a good deal to spoil your life, I realize that fully now. The rest of it you must arrange as you will, so that the harm I've done your youth may be undone as far as possible. But, when you're in your own country once more, trying to forget or put far into the background what you've gone through here, you can't grudge me the satisfaction of paying you back for — for all you did for my brother."

"I would grudge it," I insisted.

"Wrongly then, I think. You say — you may want to come back here sometimes when — I'm away. I should be glad to have you come. I should like to feel, while I live — till the place passes to the next heir, my distant cousin — that Culver Castle is the same as your own. Come and go as you will without any fear of my intruding on you. After I leave for Astra, I never want to see this house again."

A pang shot through me, as the passion in him broke through self-control in those last words. I imagined how his marriage had spoiled all the old

associations which could not have been broken, but only hallowed by Laurie's long illness and death.

"I understand," I said.

There fell a silence, and I saw that he was thinking deeply, perhaps fighting some battle with himself. I wondered what was to come. It seemed that I must now have walked through the deepest waters, till the moment of our last parting of all; yet I was mistaken.

"I hate divorce, and don't believe in it!" he almost flung at me. "But I owe you so much — and I've no sure way of paying the debt. They say that in your country they think differently of divorce from what we do here. If you can divorce me, over there — free yourself, and live the rest of your life as if we'd never met, do so. Ours is an exceptional case. We're man and wife only in name."

I felt the blood slowly drained from my heart. Again for an instant I feared that I might faint. But closing my eyes, and waiting for a second or two before speaking, helped me, as it had a few minutes ago.

"I must know," I said, "whether you're speaking this time entirely for my sake, or partly for your own."

"For God's sake, have you any doubts as to that? For your sake, then — wholly. What good would it do me?"

"I thought perhaps, you might some day want to — to —" but after all I dared not finish.

"Don't say it," he ordered, rather than asked, me. "The last thing I should ever want would be — what was in your mind, and better unspoken. I talked of an *American* divorce. I'm told there is such a thing — legal, and all that. I've heard of women going

to Nevada — is n't it? and freeing themselves, so that it's considered quite right in their country to marry again. If you'd like — ”

“ I would n't ! ” I snapped at him, to hold myself back from hysterics. “ I'd hate it — hate it ! Do you think I'd marry any one ? I don't care about what's 'legal.' To me, once married, is always married.”

“ Ah, the pity of it ! And you're not much more than a child. But, as I pointed out to you, the tie that binds us together is — different from other marriage ties. It's not fair to you — ”

“ We won't talk about what's fair to me, please,” I went on, trying to be calmer and gentler, but hardly succeeding. “ If *you* don't want to — to — ”

“ I should not be free according to English laws in any case,” he explained icily. “ Nor have I the slightest wish to be free, I assure you.”

“ You may n't have that wish,” I caught him up, “ and I quite understand. But at least, I shall make you no further trouble, personally, in future. I shall go to America when you go to Astra, and you need never see me again, or even communicate with me, if it distresses you, except through lawyers. I suppose you could manage in that way ? ”

“ Easily,” he replied, in an odd voice, with an equally odd expression. I saw that I had displeased him, but I did n't quite see how or why. I did think that I was doing my very best to content him ! But whatever I have done has always seemed to be wrong where Miles was concerned. I looked back with a sad, benevolent pity at myself — myself as I had been when Lady Mel first told me I might, with courage and tact, be able to help him eventually, and I had agreed with her ideas. How I had miscalculated the power of

my poor little individuality, a pigmy thing compared to his, *much* smaller and meaner than the proverbial mouse we're all so tired of, who gnawed the lion out of his net!

"There's one thing, however," Miles continued with a deadly calmness, "which I should like to make clear before any lawyers intervene, and that is, the question of money affairs. You generously arranged that a certain part of your fortune should be handed over to me. I hoped — I believed — that my brother might be saved; so I took what you gave me. Now he's gone, and with him the need of more money than I can earn in my profession. Keep up this place, if you choose, for yourself. I can't afford to do it justice, or make it fit for you, unfortunately, or I gladly would. Spend your money on it. But as for me, I'll have no more. I'll give you back every penny of yours that's not already gone."

A wave of fire seemed to sweep over me as he spoke these words. Unable to control myself, hardly knowing what I was doing or meant to do, I sprang up.

"If you dare try to give me back one cent of that *hateful* money," I cried, "I shall feel that you've injured and insulted me more cruelly than any woman was ever injured or insulted before!"

And with that, as if some strange spirit not my own possessed me, I rushed out of the room and slammed the door.

I don't know exactly what happened for the next minute or two, after I got into my bedroom, but I woke out of a kind of stupor of rage — or anger — or both — to find myself lying face down on the great bed, sobbing like a broken-hearted child.

February 5th.

Not a word or sign from Miles.

After a long time had passed — an hour, perhaps — Miss Timpson happened to come to me yesterday afternoon. I asked her to go into my sitting-room and bring a book from the table. I was sure that *he* would be gone, but I had to make certain, and I simply could n't go myself.

I suppose he is utterly disgusted with me now. Well, soon he'll be rid of me! Six weeks may seem long to him, in thinking ahead, but he'll have so much to do in getting ready for Astra that the time will be gone before he knows. I, too, shall have things to do. There will be letters to write, careful letters needing thought, and cablegrams to get off. Perhaps I'd better send one to Aunt Dora in time to meet her on arriving in New York, just to say that I've suddenly decided to come over for a long visit, and asking her to get me rooms at the Fairmont — my old rooms if possible.

I had a wild idea of suggesting to Miles that I might, if he approved, take back my own name, in America, so as not to be associated with him always, and keep people remembering and talking. But I see now it would have been a ridiculous suggestion. I feel certain he would not have consented. Things will adjust themselves somehow, and stupid little pin-pricks of gossip can't really harm a man like Miles Culver. Anyhow, at worst, the pin-pricks — with me at a distance — will be more bearable than the wasp stings of my daily, boring presence.

February 10th.

I wrote to Lady Meldon, telling her that I had decided to go for a long visit to America, when Miles left for Astra; just that, and no more. Reading the letter over carefully, it seemed to me that there was nothing hidden "between the lines" which even her eyes — made keen by sympathy for us both — could decipher. I want her to believe, as Miles does, that I am really pining to "go home." Otherwise — if she had the faintest glimmering of suspicion — it's just possible she might think it right to "speak to" Miles.

This morning an answer came to my letter. Lady Mel makes no comments on my decision, but begs me to come to London and stay with her a few days. "I long to have you," she says, "and I really think it would do you good to get away for a little while from that great lonely house of mourning. You know I should love to keep you for more than a few days; but if you are going away from the Castle for a long visit, I suppose you'll have things to do, and I won't try to persuade you to give me more time than you think best. But do come, and *quickly*. My brother is quite excited at the prospect of having his favorite under our roof. You will be a petted child with us, and that, I hope, you won't mind being. You've been rather too grown up lately, with all the world except your nice, funny, old-maid nurse. You're to bring her, too, of course."

It was a temptation to say "yes — yes!" in a telegram, for there was no one to consult. Miles, of course, would not care, one way or the other. But just as I was looking out a telegraph-form, I had a visit from him. He came to say that he was called to London on official business. He would be there

nearly a fortnight. Would I care to go, and stay with Lady Mel? He added that he did not like to leave me alone at Culver, at such a sad and dreary time.

Instantly I guessed that Lady Meldon had some wild hope of trying to bring us to a "better understanding," under her roof: that she meant to "use her influence" to make me go with Miles to Astra. Already I'd suspected from her letter that some vague idea of the sort was hovering in her mind. Now I was certain of it. And I was afraid of myself. I know her sweet persuasiveness so well, that immediately I determined not to venture within the danger zone. I daren't risk being hypnotized, by any specious reasonings, into quartering myself upon Miles in this new phase of his career. So instead of accepting, I refused, with many thanks and many excuses. The worst of it is, that the best of my excuses are lame, and I'm afraid they won't pass Lady Meldon without betraying their limp.

February 15th.

Miles has gone to London.

Though we've scarcely seen each other since Laurie went, just knowing that he was in the house made it seem *alive*. Now, it is dead and haunted, haunted with strange echoes that call sadly as I pass from room to room. Yet I love the place, for its own sake as well as Miles's, who loves it too, I know.

Luckily there is much for me to do. The plan for restoration was approved by Miles long ago, but it was always understood that everything was to "wait until Laurie was better." Now, could Miles know that I never mean to come back, he would not let the

work be done, I'm sure, because he has so great a horror of benefiting by my miserable money. But I tacitly allowed him to believe that I may live at Culver Castle some little part of each year. I want to feel, when I'm out of his life, that I've been able to do for him some small thing, which may be of lasting good. Not that I want him to associate the "good" with me. That would spoil it all. But he will be out of England while the work of the Castle goes on; and when he comes back he need not realize how much work has been done. The value of the place will have increased for him, and there'll be no more crumbling walls or uninhabitable rooms; but many of the changes will be of a kind which a preoccupied man may pass unnoticed. I shall love to think, when I am far away, of this beautiful old home of his ancestors, made more beautiful, more worthy of Miles, by me. For though I've not been happy here, I would not unlive one single hour; and no house in the world ever was, or ever can be, so dear and so sacred to me, as Culver Castle.

The architect who will undertake the work is here; and I have told the old head-gardener to get in many assistants, so that in a short time the splendid gardens may be made what they ought to be, and still were, a generation or two ago. There is quite an army of skilled workers in the house, repairing the beautiful old furniture, treating the worm-holed oak; and patterns of the splendid, torn brocades and damasks which hung in tatters from many walls, windows and chairs, have gone to a famous factory to be copied. There is a bitter sweet joy in all this for me. It is like leaving my blessing for Miles, when I have passed away from him, like a shadow.

February 28th.

A letter from Miles!

I did n't expect him to write. At most, I thought he might telegraph, to say that he was coming back again at such and such a time. But this is a real letter; and there is something in it which terrifies, yet rejoices me, in spite of myself.

He proposes — no, “proposes” is hardly the word — he *tells* me that I am to join him. And yet it is n't precisely a command. It's put almost as if he were asking a favor: but he so evidently expects me to consent that it's the same thing as a very polite order from a superior officer.

I've heard both Miles and Lady Meldon speak of a Mrs. Studholme, a very old lady, an aunt of Sir George Meldon. Lady Mel and Mr. Graeme both go to visit her sometimes, in Devonshire, in an old house where she lives, and where — it seems — Sir George Meldon was born. Miles goes, too, but has never been since we were married. Laurie's illness would, of course, have kept him from paying visits, even if another sorrow had not inclined him to a hermit's life.

Lady Mel has told me how this old lady almost worships Miles, partly for himself, partly because he risked his life in a vain attempt to save her nephew, who was as dear to her as a son. But what I heard had slipped into a dim, dusty corner of my brain, so that I seemed to have forgotten, until the reminder came from Miles.

“I'm not sure if you have heard me speak of my dear old friend, Mrs. Studholme,” he says in his letter. “In case you have n't, I'll preface what I'm going to ask, by telling you something about her: although I'm almost sure Lady Mel must have talked to you

of her husband's aunt, whom she loves so dearly. Mrs. Studholme is nearly eighty, and so delicate as to seem more like a spirit than an ordinary, material creature. She has the heart of a girl, and though she's old-fashioned in her ways and ideas, she is one of the most delightful and charming old ladies in the world. St. Cross, her house in Devonshire, near Sidmouth, is as charming as herself, and as old-fashioned — small, but perfect in its quaint way. She has kept all her faculties except her eyesight, and that is rapidly failing. I have known her since I was a boy, and some of my best holidays were spent at St. Cross. She has always been good to me, and since the death of Sir George Meldon, she has seemed to cling to me in a way both sweet and pathetic. When we married she would have liked to see you, but of course a visit was not possible then. I wrote her a few days ago of my speedy departure for Astra, asking if I should run down for a day or two, to say good-bye — though I was ashamed to confess it was Lady Mel who reminded me of the necessity for a farewell visit. By return came an appeal from Mrs. Studholme to bring my wife; and she puts her request in such a sweet and affecting way that it would give me great pain to refuse. She thinks, of course, that you are going out to Astra with me, and she points out that, with her increasing blindness, she may not be able to 'see the wife I have chosen,' when we come back to England, even if she lives.

"To say that I can't give her the pleasure she begs for, will mean explanations, and they will be difficult, unless I implant a distressing idea in her kind and unsophisticated heart. If you can bring yourself to help me out of this difficulty by consenting to make

the visit, I shall be grateful. It need be only for two days at most. If you agree, you can perhaps come to London and meet me, stopping a night at my hotel, as Lady Meldon is away. Then we will travel to Devonshire together, and you can feel that you have done something to brighten the last days of a dear creature, more saint than woman.

"Please wire, and if we go, next Tuesday will be convenient for me, provided it suits you."

This letter of Miles' has no beginning (he could n't very well start it with an exclamatory "You"!) and it ends "Yours — M. C." But the only other scrap of his writing I possess has no signature at all. I shall value this: and what memories it will bring back in years to come, when I turn over these pages of my Breviary that will guard it — memories I can't guess at now, for they will be woven in this visit; strands whose color I can't yet see, or how they may be blended. Because, of course, I shall do as Miles asks, though I see "as through a glass darkly," the hand of Lady Meldon pulling our strings exactly as if we were both marionettes.

Even the fact that she is away from home seems vaguely suspicious. She wrote, the other day, from Chelsea, and said nothing then about leaving home. I can't quite make out the connection, but I feel its existence. I'd just excused myself, elaborately, from visiting her, so she expected to be in London then. Did she think, perhaps, that I'd still refuse, in dread of "reconciliation" tactics; or was she afraid that if I were with her, I might ask awkward questions about this new Devonshire plan? I wonder! Yet I may be mistaken in every one of my imaginings, because it was always Lady Mel's advice from the

first, to leave Miles to himself and not force myself upon his attention.

I've telegraphed that I will meet Miles next Monday afternoon in London, at Brown's Hotel, where he is staying.

Later.

A wire has come, thanking me for mine, and asking if I can manage to get on without a maid, as Mrs. Studholme's house is small. I shall leave Miss Timpson here. She has a cold, and a touch of rheumatism, so she won't be sorry not to travel just now — though she would have borne my standard (alias dressing-bag) like a good old soldier, if she had marching orders.

Miles need not have been afraid of her gossiping about us to the servants; she's far too proud, for my sake, as well as too conscientious. But, of course, she is an unknown quantity to him, and perhaps his one reason for not wanting her, truly, is because the Devonshire house is too small.

I dread the visit a little, yet I long for it. We're going to be at St. Cross on show, as a newly married couple; and as Miles's object is to please his old friend by displaying his bride, he will have to be nice to me, before her, in a different way from the kind, distant "niceness" I've known.

It will hurt — oh, how it will hurt! Yet how well worth suffering the pain will be.

I am in such a strange state of mind about going that I can hardly sleep or eat.

Of course, I shall see nothing of Miles except when we are with Mrs. Studholme or her family — if she has a family. Probably we shall be given rooms ad-

joining: but two people can be as far away from each other in next-door rooms as if they were one at the South Pole, the other at the North.

In my mind, I shall name our rooms for these extremes of the earth! Miles's will be the frozen North Pole, ice-bound and adorned with colonies of white bears. Mine will be the South Pole — which has always been considered comparatively uninteresting since its existence was suspected: therefore it's suited to Sandy Phayre.

BROWN'S HOTEL,
SOUTH POLE, No. 1, March 4th.

It feels nice and warm, but it *is* the South Pole, nevertheless, and I don't even know where the North Pole is. Maybe it's divided from the S. P. only by a wall. Maybe it's situated beyond my sitting-room. Maybe it's at the other end of the house. With that, I'm not concerned. We meet on neutral ground, in the sitting-room, which Miles tacitly denies all part in, by calling it mine.

He met me at the railway-station, and put me into a taxi. He could n't take me to the hotel, he said, because he had an engagement just at that time at the War Office, but I would find my rooms ready, and he hoped I would be comfortable.

The sitting-room is full of lovely flowers — violets and daffodils, bowls and vases full of them. I wonder if Miles ordered them for me, or if they just "come," the way things do in hotels when you have private sitting-rooms?

Night.

We have dined together, Miles and I, alone at a table for the very first time. Always before, when he and I have shared a meal, there has been Laurie, or Marguerite, or Lady Meldon, or some one. The first meal we ate together, *there was Helène*.

This dinner was in "my" sitting-room; but after all, we were never alone for more than three minutes at a stretch, because of the extraordinarily nice, excessively English waiters, who looked exactly like high-church dignitaries in disguise. When at last these two dignified yet mellow personages had vanished, leaving us to our coffee, there was such an obligation to be politely agreeable that neither of us could think of anything to say for several alarming moments. I think even Miles was under this spell, judging by his face, and the passionately interested way in which he stirred his coffee; though it seems absurd that he could be embarrassed with a slip of a thing like me.

At last, in desperation I blurted out questions about his doings in London: whether his business had been satisfactory and so on. He answered almost gratefully; and if we had been a Berlitz class of two, practicing a new language in easy sentences, we could not have got on better. By and by we drifted into talking of Mrs. Studholme. He told me two or three anecdotes of her as she had been when he was a boy, and her nephew, Sir George, a young man. "When I was a youngster, he was my hero," Miles said; and I almost blurted out, "Oh, yes, just as you were mine!" How dreadful if I had! I should have been obliged at once to jump out of the window, or into the fire.

But Mrs. Studholme must be a dear old lady, quite

like some one in a book. Perhaps it's as well she can't see faces distinctly, or she would be more than ever astonished that Miles married so soon after the death of beautiful Helène, whose fame must have reached St. Cross during the engagement days, if not before.

The anecdotes put us almost at ease, till suddenly a pause fell. There was a frightening feeling, as if personal thoughts, personal things, crowded unseen round us, clamoring to be discussed. But Miles got up and said quickly, "Well, I must go. You're tired, I dare say. I won't see you to-morrow till noon, and we must lunch very early, as our train leaves Paddington at two."

Then we bade each other good-night, Miles adding, "I hope you'll sleep well."

I shan't!

ST. CROSS, *March 7th.*

My Book, my Book, how glad I am that I brought you here with me! I should simply burst like a soap-bubble if I had n't any one to tell things to; and you are always my only one.

Well, we had the long journey together, I looking out of the window till it grew too dark, and Miles reading newspapers and reviews. When the electricity had to be turned on, I read, too. But all the time I was thinking about St. Cross, and what it would be like there, and what Mrs. Studholme would think of her adored friend's American bride. As fast as I turned a page, I forgot what had been on the page before.

I *was* glad when we arrived at Sidmouth! By that time it was quite dark, so I could see very little when

we got out of the train; but I imagined a smell of spring in the air, and a softness as of the south. Hardly were we on the platform when a fat groom, like a middle-aged cherub in livery, touched his hat to Miles with a radiant smile of recognition. One would hardly suppose that anything in the shape of a groom could radiate like that!

The porters, too, knew Miles, and beamed respectfully upon him with hero-worshiping eyes. Of course, I was gazed at with veiled curiosity; and I could imagine Sir Miles Culver's loyal admirers saying later to their wives: "What a fine gentleman like 'im ever saw in a shrimp like 'er, I *can't* think!"

The shrimp in question — quite a pale, thin shrimp in black — ambled meekly beside its lord to an old-fashioned but well-appointed vehicle whose surname, I believe, is barouche. There were two fat brown horses with sympathetic expressions, like old family friends; and they certainly bowed to Miles, even if they only appeared to smile. On the box sat an elderly coachman, also fat and with much the same expression as the horses; and his livery being brown of the same shade as their coats, added to the resemblance.

Inside the carriage was a very nice smell; just a faint dash of mustiness mingling with an indescribably haunting suggestion of lavender, and dried rose-leaves, and other sweet things in which dear old ladies keep their clothing put away in presses. I spoke of this to Miles, for the sake of something to say, and he seemed rather pleased. "I was wondering if you'd notice it," he said. "It belongs to St. Cross, and Mrs. Studholme, in my thoughts. She likes me to call her Aunt Rosalie. Is n't it a delightful name for

an old lady whose things all smell of roses? And you must n't be surprised if she asks you to call her that."

"I shall be very complimented if she does," I assured him.

"It will be kind of you to humor her in any way you can," Miles went on; and I knew from his tone that there was something more he wanted, yet hardly liked, to say. He thought for a minute, as if wondering whether he really could do it or not, and then began again in a worried, boyish way which waked in me all the mother that has lain half asleep since doll-days: "I hardly know how to put it, without almost asking you to be deceitful; but you know, if you could somehow make her think you're happy with me, and — that you like me a little, as other young married women like their husbands, it would be — I mean, I'd be grateful if you could save the dear old angel from distressing herself about us. She's really fond of me, you see, and I hate to go away from here, after the last visit I may ever make, leaving her wretched — puzzling her dear innocent heart and brain about our — our home life."

If he had guessed how hard it was not to exclaim, "*Like* is a mild word for what I feel for you!" he would have had a disagreeable shock of surprise. But all I said was, "I'll do my best to make Mrs. Studholme believe we are the kind of married couple she would like to have us."

"Thank you very much," Miles replied, gratefully. "I'm afraid you think me a fool — but wait till you see what she's like, and you'll understand."

"I understand now," I said.

"It's good of you to say so. And — you won't

let her know that you are leaving me for good, when you go to America? She's sure, in her kind, interested way, to question us about our plans, but if you can manage without lying, to make it seem as if you were going on a visit — she may n't live long enough to find out the truth."

"I can easily manage that," I consoled him. "I say the same thing to every one — that is, to the few people I've seen or written to."

We subsided into silence after this, a dreamy silence which had in it the spell of the haunting perfume, the rose and lavender which seemed, with the faint hint of mustiness, to be the fragrance of a happy past.

It was not long before we arrived at a gate with tall stone posts nearly covered with ivy. I had a glimpse of a tiny lodge, with a thatched roof like a shock of pale hair over bright eyes — eyes which were diamond-paned windows. Then the sympathetic horses trotted cosily along a short but winding drive, and in three or four minutes stopped in front of a long, low house which appeared to be a bungalow. It, too, had a thatched roof, which came down to shade and protect a kind of veranda. I saw high chimneys, like tall ears of rabbits rising out of the soft gray, bunny-fur of the thatch. And out of the long, diamond-paned French windows there stole a light more rosy than yellow, which showed that at St. Cross in March, big open fires had a part more important to play than mere lamps.

The door flew open as wheels and trotting hoofs stopped. A fat cherubic butler, who must be the father of the cherubic groom, bustled out. Miles helped me from the carriage in a way that might

almost pass for loverlike. The covered veranda was paved with charming little cobblestones in different colors and patterns. Basket chairs were standing about; and there was a thick curtain of ivy with windows cut in it. A delicious smell of warm salt sea, wet earth and trees in bud was on the soft, fluttering breeze.

As if he were unconscious of what he did, Miles guided me indoors with a hand on my shoulder. I thrilled under it, and suddenly felt wildly happy and desperately sad.

We stepped straight from the pretty cobblestones of the veranda into a square hall, low-ceilinged, with black oak beams. All over the white walls and the black beams danced a rose-red light which sparkled on glass and frames of old-colored prints, and struck out ruby sparks deep down in the depths of convex mirrors.

There was a standing lamp or two, and a number of rose-shaded candles, in silver or glittering crystal sticks; but it was the fire in the huge old fireplace that dominated everything, and gave the first welcome.

As we crossed the threshold together, a figure came toward us, a figure all white from head to foot, rather a frail figure, slightly bent, and with the smallness of old age, as if it had shrunk a little under the weight of years. The white hair, under a cap of pretty old lace, glittered like silver; and the ivory-white face was just touched with rose by the firelight. Such a sweet old face! I fell in love with it instantly; and if I had n't understood before, why Miles wanted Mrs. Studholme to be happy about "us" at any cost, I should have understood then. In the rosy light I could see hardly any wrinkles, and the eyes looked young as

a saint's; yet somehow I realized that the frail little lady in the trailing white dress was very old. When she was holding my hands in her tiny ones, slightly crippled with rheumatism, and gazing up into my face, I saw the film that clouded the childlike blue eyes, behind the neat little, gold-rimmed glasses.

"Dear Miles! Dear Miles, how good of you to come, and bring her!" she cooed, in a voice that still had a ring of youth in it. "And what a sweet girl! I'm not too blind to see that, I thank God," she went on, patting my hands. "You have a dear little face, my child, just the right face to make home happy for this great hero of ours. Was it her big true eyes made you love her, Miles?"

I would have rushed to his rescue if I could, by hurriedly breaking in, but he answered without waiting for my help. "Yes, she has nice eyes. I've noticed that, Aunt Rosalie."

"I should think so, indeed! And what hair, too! I shall look forward to seeing it better when her hat's off, by and by. You must be starving, you poor, dear little girl — and Miles, too. I know you like your tea, with plenty of Devonshire cream in it. Too bad it's so late: but dinner won't be till a quarter past eight. Come into the drawing-room, and you shall have your tea in a minute. Then you shall go upstairs; but before you go, I must explain what has happened. Dear me, a most sad thing! You will both sympathize."

She led us by the hand into the drawing-room which was low, and chintzy, and quaintly pretty. Tea appeared almost instantly, and I was asked to pour it out. "I'm so blind, dear, I never dare! Besides, it is nice to see you do it, as if you were at home. There! now I may tell you the news. Miles, you

remember my great nephew, Willy Fairburn? He was a little boy when you were a big one. You have n't seen him since he went to Canada, I think, but he has been back here several times, and once brought his Canadian bride — on just such a night as this, when you bring yours. But ah, how different! Well — I can hardly bear to tell it and sadden your first hour with me; but these things happen. The pretty young wife has died suddenly and left Willy alone with his little two-year-old girl. The poor boy has come to me with his child and nurse. It was all a surprise. He arrived only yesterday from Liverpool, asking if I could take them. Of course I answered yes, and I'm delighted — delighted — but if it could have been a little later, I should have been glad. This is such a tiny house — a mere bird's nest. I have but three guest rooms, and now I've had to give up one to Willy, one to the nurse with the child. Of course I've saved the best and biggest. But I wanted you both to be so comfortable here and not miss your northern castle! That's why I must apologize. I do hope, you two dear lovers, that you won't mind much being stuffed into one room? I *will* say it's quite a nice room, with a lovely view away to the sea."

If the ceiling had suddenly fallen on my head I could hardly have been more stunned. I could n't speak, but would n't have known what to say even if I'd been able to do more than open my mouth and gasp.

A pause would distress the darling, I knew, but it threatened, when Miles sprang to the rescue. "Of course we don't mind, dear," he replied briskly, and something in his tone called my eyes to his. They said, "Trust me to get you and myself out of this scrape."

I don't know what mine answered, though I tried to make them telephone back, "Yes, all right." They would have been quite unequal to expressing words of more than one syllable, for they felt as if little nerves were beating in their pupils, making them dilate and contract very fast.

"I hoped you would n't mind *too* much," Mrs. Studholme sighed with relief. "I am so glad you don't! Now I can settle down to enjoying your visit. And it will please poor Willy to meet you both. Of course he is an admirer of Miles. And that reminds me, dear girl: Miles has told me in a letter, answering one of *many* questions, that your name is Cassandra. A charming, old-fashioned name! But what do you let your friends call you? I don't want to steal any pet name given you by your husband. That would n't be fair to him. Only give me right to some little name not appropriated by Miles."

What would they have said, how would they have looked, if I'd answered promptly; "My husband's pet name for me is *You*. It is quite free to all." Some wild imp that lodges, not lives in me, wanted to say it, and watch the effect. But I have become cleverly expert in sitting on that imp. He ought by now to be quite flat like a paper doll. I squashed him neatly for the thousandth time, and offered Mrs. Studholme a choice between Sandy and Sandra.

"Which do you like better?" she asked, patting my hand.

"I think Sandy more suited to me, but I've always wanted to be Sandra," I told her. "Nobody has ever called me that."

"What — not even Miles?" she laughed incredulously — a pretty, childlike laugh.

"Not even — he."

"Then I'm sure he calls you something *much* better!" (I dared not look at Miles, or the imp might have squeaked or giggled.) "But may *I* have Sandra?"

"Ah, do!" I exclaimed.

"Thank you, dear child — dear Sandra. And now will you call me Aunt Rosalie, as Miles does?"

"Aunt Rosalie," I echoed.

She kissed me with a rose and lavender kiss, her little soft lips being in themselves like sweet, faded rose leaves.

"Now to take you up to your room!" she proposed. "We will all three go together. I should like to hear Miles say whether he remembers it. He slept there once, as a boy, and pretended to be very proud. I said then, 'Some day your bride shall have it.' If Sandra will forgive me, I'll show her the way on Miles's arm, for I'm a little uncertain at night, and Nicolson, my maid, won't let me go about by lamp-light much alone."

I followed them through fascinating corridors where, if you did not "look alive," you either fell down or up unexpected shallow steps. In a wing of the rambling old one-story house we came to a half-open door cut dark and sharp on a background of flickering red-gold light. Miles stopped. "This is the room, is n't it!" he asked; and Aunt Rosalie was enchanted that he should remember.

The kind old lady unlinked herself from Miles's guiding arm, and slipping hers round my waist, led me in.

I saw a charming room with an immense bay window and a glowing fireplace. Lamplight and candle-

light were triumphed over, as in other rooms, by the rosy leaping fire which deepened the pink of large chintz roses on a white ground, draping windows, curtaining the huge four-poster bedstead, and covering easy-chairs and dressing-table.

"Your big luggage will all be in the powder-closet," Mrs. Studholme announced. "You must let Nicolson unpack and help you, because you've sacrificed yourselves to my small quarters, and come without maid or man."

"Oh, we won't need any help, thank you!" I recklessly exclaimed, for I could not bear the prospect of Nicolson before some plan of campaign had been drawn up between Miles and me. "I've brought very little, being in mourning, you know."

"Just as you like, dear. If you'd really rather do everything for yourself and Miles, you *shall*," said Aunt Rosalie. "But here is Nicolson at my heels like the good watch-dog she is, ready to lend me her arm and her eyes."

In the corridor hovered a wonderfully neat little woman, exactly like a pin-cushion doll with a hickory-nut head I once possessed and passionately loved. Miles advanced and shook hands with the doll-come-alive, which pleased her so much that she shed tears out of bead-like black eyes. I was then introduced to her, which caused another small inundation; and with a very old voice — just such a voice as a hickory-nut, pin-cushion doll ought to have, she complimented me respectfully. "I'm sure, your ladyship, it's what we've always prayed for, to see Sir Miles, we've known from a little boy, bringing a bride to this house. May you be happy, if you'll pardon me the liberty, my lady, and it is not possible for you to be

otherwise with such a noble-hearted and famous gentleman as your ladyship's husband."

At this we all laughed, which flustered Nicolson extremely, and caused her to apologize if she had said anything "not fitting." Then she had to be reassured; and before I quite knew what had happened, Miles and I were left alone.

"If I'd dreamed of this embarrassment for you," he began quickly, leaving the door still ajar, "I would n't have subjected you to it for the world. I'd have made some excuse not to bring you here. But it's too late to think of that now. I know you'll absolve me of meaning to annoy you; and don't be more upset about this than you can help. The minute Aunt Rosalie said she'd kept her biggest and best room, I guessed which one she meant, and remembered about the powder-closet. Look" — and he went to a door lower than the one opening into the corridor — "this will be my bedroom. Later on I'll carry in that sofa and make myself comfortable without disturbing you in the least. You can forget my existence, as if I were at the other end of the house."

Forget his existence! As if any woman could, were he near or far! It is a good many years now since I have been able to forget it.

"There is n't space for a sofa in there with the luggage," I said. "We must have the trunks here. Could n't I take the powder-closet and you this room? That way would be much better suited to our respective sizes."

"Certainly not," said Miles, laughing a little.

"But that tiny cell is so — so inadequate!"

"I shall think I'm in a stateroom."

"Yes. On the way to Astra." I wished that I had not just then been reminded of Astra.

"If the two boxes really won't bother you here, I'll haul them out of the powder-closet. I can fit up a first-rate dressing-table for myself on a chair."

"No," said I, "you shall have this little stand; and there's a mirror in my dressing-bag that will just do. But oh — your *bath*?"

"Nothing simpler," he reassured me. "I shall walk out of my low window — luckily there is one! — come back into the house by the door on the veranda that lets me in at the end of this corridor, and so to the bath."

"If the door should be locked?"

"I'll take possession of the key. They don't bother much about locking up here. Don't worry over me. I assure you I shall be all right. Now for your box" — and lifting the trunk as if it had been made of cardboard, he set it down in my room. "I'll get out a few things from mine, and it can stay in the closet."

"No, no," I said. "It's so much brighter here. You can't see in your place. Put your trunk close to the door in my room, then unpack what you want, and take the things into your own den. Too bad! You'll have to hang everything on chairs!"

"You forget I'm an old campaigner," he reminded me, cheerfully; but he obeyed, and brought out his box, thinking no doubt to save argument.

As he has no man of his own, probably one of the footmen at the Castle had done his packing there: but at the hotel the great Sir Miles had evidently been his own valet. It is the easiest thing in the world for a woman to see what she wants to see —

or does n't! — without looking: and though I was ostensibly engaged in opening my dressing-bag, I saw through the back of my head that poor Miles's trunk was in a parlous state. No doubt he had left his packing till the last minute, and then had finished it anyhow, in a furious hurry. The old-fashioned leather trunk was a good-sized one, for he had made a week's stay in London before coming to Devonshire; and as he knew there would be one or two functions of official importance — an inspection at Aldershot, and so on — he had brought away his dress uniform from Culver Castle. It was bundled in on the top of everything else; and tossing it on the floor to get at his evening clothes underneath, a lot of medals and orders and things fell out, scattering here and there. Irresistibly I was drawn from my own work to help pick them up.

"You must n't do that!" Miles exclaimed, when I stooped to retrieve his belongings.

"Oh, do let me," I pleaded. "You know — I've never seen them."

"They're not worth your stooping for," said he, and scooped up a handful of glittering things, which he let me take from him, and quite reverently lay on the table. Then out came more clothes, in his search for what he wanted that night and next morning; but I could not see his uniform lying ignominiously on the floor — the uniform which, in my secret heart, was a thing sacred and beloved. I gathered it up and laid it neatly over the back of a chair. "You can leave it there till you're packing up to go away," I said, trying to speak with benevolent indifference, but intensely anxious to have my way.

"Why should my things take up space here and

make your room untidy?" he asked. "The uniform can go back into the box."

"It is *so* wrinkled it needs to be shaken out," I argued. "And it is n't a bit in my way, really. This is such a big room, and there are such lots of chairs. Besides" — seeing determination in his eyes — "don't you think it looks — er — more *realistic* to have a few of your things lying around?"

He laughed again. "Perhaps! Well, just as you like. I've got everything I need now from my box. The rest is in my suit-case. So I won't bother you again till you're dressed for dinner. Give a rap on the door as a signal when you're ready for me to join you."

He had a tidal wave of clothes billowing over his arm, and a spray of collars, handkerchiefs and neckties frothing on top. This light spray divided itself from the parent wave before Miles had reached the door of his den, and would have been on the floor if I had not made a quick dash to the rescue.

"What an untidy man!" I exclaimed, disrespectfully, then looked up, a little frightened, but only to meet a more friendly smile than he had ever given me. I could n't help feeling happy and suddenly at home in the world which had seemed large and lonely. I helped Miles not only to carry his things, but to arrange them, and insisted on supplementing his solitary candle with another from my store. There was just room for the two silver sticks to stand one on each side of the mirror, taken from my dressing-bag, with which I insisted on adorning his small table.

When the door was shut between us I still felt a singular sense of contentment, and hummed softly to myself as I dressed for dinner. My simple black

evening dress was not unbecoming, and I was glad that I looked well — not for Miles's eyes, because I knew it was unlikely he would notice — but for his sake, to please his friends.

At last I gave the "signal" by tapping on the powder-closet door, but Miles did not come out. I tapped again, lest he had not heard, whereupon a desperate voice answered: "I'm having the most awful luck with my neckties. I've spoiled four. You'd better go to the drawing-room without me."

I hesitated, then ventured to ask if I might open the door.

"If you don't mind my shirt-sleeves," came the answer; whereupon I peeped into the ill-lighted cell. I was rather thrilled by Miles in his "shirt-sleeves." The broad and polished expanse of white gave the effect of a marble bust of a man with a nobly carved head of bronze.

"No wonder you're having trouble!" I said. "There's only light enough to make darkness visible. May I tie your necktie? I know I can do it all right."

"Will you really?" he asked. "They've got on my nerves. I seem to have developed nerves lately. I believe this is the last white tie but one I have left, so the situation's getting serious."

"Come into my room where there's plenty of light," I commanded with an authoritative air. He obeyed meekly.

I was afraid my hands might tremble, as I took upon myself the alarming responsibility of succeeding with the "last tie but one." I felt that life would not be worth living if, after my boast, I should make a failure. Still, I could not keep my heart from beating

fast, which made the task difficult, for the beating was in my fingers too. There was just the faintest smell of nice cigarette smoke about Miles, as I stood closer to him than I had ever stood, gravely doing his necktie. It was fascinating and delicious, somehow, far more than any other cigarette smoke in the world, even when we used secretly to indulge at school, as a great adventure. If I raised my eyes above necktie-zone, I looked straight up to Miles's firm brown chin, cleft in the center, but after the first involuntary glance I dared not take another, because the overpowering thought of what it would be like to be clasped in his arms, kissed by him, turned me giddy. And being giddy was not conducive to precision in necktie-tying.

In spite of all, however, I mastered both myself and the folded strip of white piqué — or whatever it was.

"Beautifully done. Many thanks!" was my reward from Miles, as he criticized the finished product in a big wardrobe mirror. Instantly and sentimentally I resolved that, in future, while I occupied this room, I would look at myself in that glass and no other.

There seemed a mysterious charm in the thought of seeing my image in a mirror where Miles had been reflected by my side.

He dashed back to his den to get himself into waistcoat and coat; and three minutes later we were walking sedately along the corridor together, like the happy married couple whose rôle we were playing.

Aunt Rosalie was already in the drawing-room, soft and sweet as a dove, in gray satin of a charmingly old-fashioned cut. Then, a few minutes later arrived "poor Willy," the Mr. Fairburn who had lately lost

his wife — a dark, pale young man with tragedy in his heavy-lidded eyes. He smiled with pleasure at meeting Miles again, and was polite in a gentle, low-voiced way to me. It was he who took me in to dinner, while Miles took Aunt Rosalie; and though Mr. Fairburn was very silent at first, I warmed him up to a little interest by asking questions about his child. She was named Rosalie, it appeared, in honor of Mrs. Studholme, his great-aunt, and the baby's godmother by proxy. "Rose is n't a baby, though," he said. "She's two years old. It's wonderful how intelligent a creature who has lived two short years in the world can be!"

"Don't you remember things you used to think of when you were two?" I asked. "I do, quite well. It's treacherous of grown-up people to forget their childish selves. I am so looking forward to seeing your little girl to-morrow, as early as possible."

"Do you like children?" he wanted to know, the cloud of tragedy lifted for a moment.

"I just adore them!" I answered warmly; and caught Miles's eyes fixed on me with a strange, half sad, half startled, expression, from across the table. Instantly he looked away. For some reason I found myself blushing. I suppose he had never thought much before of my little private likes and dislikes, and such an emphatic opinion from me probably astonished him. Perhaps it struck him as affected, or in bad taste, a pose put on to please the young father. But Miles does n't know, and never will know, about the dear little boy and girl who play together in the secret garden of my heart.

After dinner, Aunt Rosalie took me away to the drawing-room, and we left the two men together.

For a little while we sat together on a big chintz-covered sofa in front of the fire, my hand in hers, both talking of Miles. There was pleasure and pain in speaking of him thus, with one who had always loved him, and, knowing nothing of our relations, took it for granted that he loved me. It was very different from talking of him with Lady Meldon. With her I need not be careful what I say, because she knows I worship him, and he cares nothing for me — dislikes me, even, as much as a chivalrous man will let himself dislike a girl whose home is under his roof. With Aunt Rosalie words must be watched; but there was joy in the assumption that I was precious to Miles, as he to me. Our conversation was like a glorified game of “let’s make believe,” where you play that all the things you most want to happen have really happened, and almost think the game is true, as you play.

“I don’t wonder he fell in love, dear,” she said. “More and more I feel the charm of you! And I dare say you are very accomplished, too. Tell me, do you sing and play?”

“Not very grandly,” I laughed the question off.

“Ah, I’m sure you do, beautifully! Miles is so fond of music. That would have been one of the things which attracted him to you.”

“It was n’t, indeed!”

“Well, won’t you let me hear you? It would be so great a pleasure. I have no one to sing to me now. Please — before they come.”

I could n’t resist this pleading. Jumping up from the sofa, I went to the piano at the other end of the room. It is of a good make, and the instant I touched the keys I found it in perfect tune. I hesi-

tated for a minute what to sing, and then it occurred to me that she would love the old-fashioned ballads best. I began with "Annie Laurie," which was a great success. It had been one of the favorite songs "at home," when she was a girl. She praised my voice, and said it was "soft and sweet as a breeze blowing over a garden of red and white roses." What a poetic old lady! But the compliment pleased me all the same. She would have me sing on, and when I had given her one or two more of the old Scottish ballads she loved, she begged for something from my own country. "I've always wanted to hear a negro melody, not comic, but sweet, even if sorrowful, well sung," she said. "I have never heard any negro music well sung."

I touched the piano softly and began, "Way down upon the Swanee River," almost in a whisper. As I sang my heart swelled with the music; and if there were tears in my voice, I think my singing was none the worse, for there seems to be an undertone of weeping in the chords of that sad old song. I forgot Aunt Rosalie for a few moments; but when I remembered her, and turned my eyes at last toward the sofa where she nestled among cushions, I caught a glitter like drops of crystal on her faded, white rose cheeks. She was not looking at me, but at the door behind my back, and her finger was on her lips.

I whirled round quickly on the music-stool — for I had finished my song — and there stood Miles and Mr. Fairburn.

"How long have you been there?" I exclaimed.

"Since 'Loch Lomond,'" said Miles, quietly.

"Oh, Miles, why did n't you tell me what an exquisite voice the child has, and how perfectly she has

been trained to use it?" Aunt Rosalie inquired, almost indignantly.

For a minute he forgot the rôle he and I were so carefully playing — the rôle of lovers who knew and adored all each other's perfections.

"Because she never told me," said Miles.

"*What!*" cried the old lady. "You don't mean to say you ~~did~~ didn't know she could sing — that you never heard her?"

"She must have been keeping her accomplishment in reserve," he returned, realizing his indiscretion, and trying to amend it.

"But — how extraordinary! It is a *rare* voice. I never heard one sweeter, more moving. Only — of course it's but her art — she sings as if her heart was over-full — as if she were homesick."

"I'm afraid she is, sometimes," Miles answered. I looked at him in haste, and found him looking at me, with sad and thoughtful eyes.

"Well, I suppose it's natural," sighed the dear old lady, "in spite of all her husband's love can do! But that will pass, for her home is now with the man she has chosen above all others. Don't be anxious, Miles! She loves you enough to go happily to the end of the world with you — don't you, my little Sandra?"

"Yes," I replied, in a low voice, trying not to speak too fervently, but thankful for the relief of telling the truth without Miles' suspecting that it was the truth.

"We've done nothing but talk of you, till I begged her give me some songs," went on Aunt Rosalie, lest my "homesick singing" should sadden Miles. "And I've promised her a curl of your hair, sent me by your dear mother after it was cut for the first time, when you were five years of age. Also one of your letters

to me as a boy — I *can't* spare more, even to her, for she has you all the time, you see, and I have n't! Oh, and there's a photograph of you at Sandhurst she would like to have, I know."

"My dear Aunt Rosalie!" exclaimed Miles, actually flushing a dark red. "For heaven's sake, don't bore her with my wretched relics! She —"

"Bore her, indeed!" almost snapped the old lady. "How little those strange creatures, men—even those most in love—know us women! Why, you silly boy, those 'wretched relics,' as you call them, will be your little wife's greatest treasures. Am I not right, Sandra?"

"Quite right," I almost whispered.

"You shall have them this very night, before you sleep," she insisted, defying Miles, who was by this time looking petrified. "Willy, you are near the bell. Please ring it."

Willy obeyed, and when it was answered, Nicolson was sent for. Elaborate orders were given for the fetching of a certain Tunisian tortoise-shell box, tied up with pink ribbon because there was no lock. Presently Nicolson herself brought this treasury and deposited it upon a small table in front of her mistress. The untying of the faded pink ribbon, the raising of the red tortoise-shell and mother o' pearl lid, the daintily careful ransacking of the contents, was a ceremony. Miles still implored, and Aunt Rosalie was still adorably relentless. She separated packet from packet, found sacred things she had forgotten, laughed over some, sighed over others; and at last, having sorted out all that was to be mine, invited me to gaze upon the curl of Miles's hair (a darling fat curl of Japanese bronze color) and to read aloud to her his

letters. I could have kissed and cried over everything — especially the curl, the Sandhurst photograph and another snapshot in khaki, taken in front of a tent in South Africa — and I fully made up my mind to do so at leisure, time and place being propitious.

Soon after having collected my spoil, it was time to bid our hostess good-night. We all took candles in the hall, and Mrs. Studholme was led away by the devoted Nicolson. Mr. Fairburn announced his intention of taking a stroll, to promote sleep later, and Miles carried my candle to the room supposed to be "ours." I felt less distressed about his prison-like quarters than at first, knowing he had an easy exit through the low window, so that he too might stroll, if he chose, or even read and smoke in the library, returning late to his secret den. I took the candle he offered, and, when he had lighted several others, and quietly moved the sofa into the powder-closet bedroom, he still lingered. "Do give me those imbecile trophies Aunt Rosalie has forced on you," he said.

"No," I replied. "I'm going to keep them."

"But that's carrying conscientiousness too far. You've pleased her by pretending gratitude for her 'gifts' — heaven save the mark! and now she'll forget all about them. If you won't hand the absurd things over to me, promise to destroy them yourself. Give them honorable burial in the fire — cremate them. That need n't hurt your conscience."

"All the same, I can't promise," I said. "You must leave their fate to my discretion."

"But I'm really mortified," he still protested. "I'd no idea what you'd be subjected to here. Everything combines to distress or annoy you. If you

had n't a kind heart and a strong sense of humor you'd be hysterical by this time. Most women in your place would be."

"What makes you think I've a kind heart and a sense of humor?" I laughed, without stopping to reflect that it would be tactful to let the question slide.

"Dense as you must believe me, and blind as I know I've been, I'm not entirely without perceptive faculties," he answered, hotly. And again his brown face was stained red, as once before I had seen it, that evening.

"Well, anyhow, I'm neither distressed nor bored," I hastened to say, "though I shall be both if you try to extort promises about the presents that angelic old lady has given me. If only for her sake, they're sacred."

My smile apologized for obstinacy. A moment later, and Miles was shut up in his cell, expecting me "to forget his existence." Instead, I did exactly the opposite. His existence was a burning, scintillating star close by my side, unseen, but felt by every nerve in my brain and body.

I undressed slowly, too absorbed in thought to move quickly. My head throbbed with excitement, and when my hair was undone and brushed out, I left it hanging loose over my blue dressing-gown, instead of plaiting it for bed. Bed-time was not yet, I told myself; for never had I been more wide awake, and I knew it would be useless trying to sleep. The fire glowed pleasantly still, though it was dying down to a bed of pulsing rubies, out of which burst now and then a few sparks, like a flight of golden fireflies. I collected all my candles, in their silver sticks, in a straight row on the dressing-table, and then laid out,

as upon an altar, all Miles's medals and orders, bright curl of childish hair, his photographs, and his boy-letters, yellowed by the years.

"What treasures — what precious treasures!" I said to myself, half aloud, as I hung over the array, touching each thing with my fingers, looking long and lovingly first at one, then at another, not knowing which to call most dear.

But there was something else missing from the collection, and to-night was my last chance to brood over it, or the orders and medals which had honored the soldier. "*My soldier*," I whispered, knowing all the while that he was not mine — that he belonged more truly to the meanest British subject for whom he had fought, than to his wife.

I went to the chair on which hung his uniform, and stood gazing at the gold lace coat, as I might have gazed at a flag for which men had died. I pictured Miles wearing it — for never have I seen him in uniform, except in photographs. Then my eyes wandered to his trunk, standing close by, against the wall near the little door of the powder-closet. He had forgotten to shut the lid, and I had not ventured. His clothes were enormously interesting, yet strangely pathetic to me. On top lay several pairs of socks, and — oh, pitiful! — in one I saw a hole. I could not resist giving myself the joy of mending it, for if I replaced the sock with its fellow, Miles need never know. My small work-box was in my dressing-bag, and in it were many colored darning-silks. There was one shade there which, I believed, would match this purple sock.

I began to experience a calm and golden happiness in the thought of mending a sock for Miles. Yet I

was ready to laugh at my own absurd state of mind.

"Never mind, Sandra," I whispered, in the habit I have — like most lonely people — of talking to myself; "you can be just as absurd as you choose to-night. Miles is near, only separated from you by a wall and a door; but to all intents and purposes he's far away. This is your one chance to touch intimate things that are his, so I'll give you leave to make the most of it."

This assurance made me quite bold. Auto-suggestion, I suppose!

I got out my work-box, and selected the purple silk. Then I hastily twisted up my hair with as few pins as possible, and did a most daring, perhaps unwarrantable deed. I took Miles's coat off the chair-back, and put it on over my thin, pale blue silk dressing-gown. There was about the coat the same faint, just perceptible smell of good tobacco that had made my heart beat when I tied his necktie. Now my heart beat again, very fast. I pressed the coat close over my breast to feel the cloth that had covered his heart. I wished good wishes for his happiness, and prayed a little prayer that after to-night, when wearing this coat, he might think only kind thoughts of me.

I folded my arms, in his sleeves, round my own waist, and I kissed the sleeves, and laid my cheek against them, crooning silly words of love — such words as one might whisper to a lover who held one very dear and precious.

I was bitterly, agonizingly happy, and rapturously miserable. I never quite knew that poignant contradiction of feeling before, not even on my wedding morning.

At last, to calm myself, I sat down by my brilliantly-

lighted dressing-table to mend Miles's purple silk sock ; but I still wore the coat.

I know how to darn so nicely that it's almost a fine art ; but as Miss Timpson does my mending (unless I travel without her) I have fallen out of practice since boarding-school days. Still, I found that my hand hadn't forgotten its cunning. I made a silk lattice almost as delicate and regular as a spider web, and I was just fastening the end of silk according to a patent of my own, when the sweet night silence of the house was shattered by a loud, sharp scream.

So startled was I, in every tight-drawn nerve, that I too gave a cry. I sprang up so suddenly that my chair fell backward with a crash, on the polished oak floor, and almost at the same instant Miles flung open the powder-closet door.

He was still fully dressed, except that he wore a short jacket of brown velveteen instead of his evening coat and waistcoat. He had been reading, and there was a book in his hand which he had forgotten to put down.

"What's happened?" he exclaimed. "I — thought it must be a burglar, or —" I saw his eyes fixed in surprise on the borrowed coat I wore, and the purple sock into which my hand and wrist were thrust.

"It — it was n't I who screamed," I faltered. "I was sitting up — you don't mind *much* my putting on your coat? I — I was so cold." Stammering excuses, I hid the purple sock behind a wall of silver-topped bottles on the dressing-table, and began tearing off the gorgeous coat. In the struggle, down tumbled my hair, the few big tortoise-shell pins which had kept it up, clattering on to the floor. This added to my embarrassment, and I forgot to hide the little store of

sacred relics spread on the table — Miles's medals and orders, and my treasured gifts from Mrs. Studholme. His eyes fell upon them. I felt as if my heart lay there, exposed, defenseless.

"Mind? Of course not," he said quickly, though his brows were drawn together in a puzzled frown. "But it was a woman's scream, somewhere in the house, and —"

Before he could finish, it came again. "Help — help! fire!" the cry shrilled out.

In a second Miles was out of my room and in the corridor. I followed and saw a young woman in a gray flannel dressing-gown, tearing along in the direction of the hall, with a big bundle wrapped in a pink blanket in her arms. At the open top of the bundle was visible a mop of yellow curls, and it flashed into my mind that this was the Fairburn nurse rushing wildly about the house with the Fairburn baby.

She had shrieked "fire," but neither she nor the pink bundle was in a blaze, therefore I sprang to the conclusion that the fire, if any existed, must have been left behind in the nurse's room.

I turned, leaving Miles to deal with the frightened woman, and rescue the baby from her if need be. Running back along the corridor, I soon came to an open door and saw at a glance exactly what had happened. It is rather wonderful what a large picture one can see at a glance!

The nurse had been boiling water on a spirit-stove. This had been overturned, and the burning alcohol was running in flames shaped like an immense blue starfish, in seven or eight directions at once, over the floor. The blaze had caught a large square of green matting and was joyously eating up the lengths of

braided straw. Also it had begun to feed on the drapery of an old-fashioned "petticoated" dressing-table, which stood by a window hung with lace curtains, and near a crib with a trailing cover of silk.

For my life I could n't remember whether water drowned or encouraged flaming spirit, but I had to run the risk, and snatching a big tin of water that stood by the baby's bath, I dashed the contents on the fire. Joy! The gay blue snakes hissed and died down — but only for a minute. The matting and the table-cover were thoroughly on fire by this time, and the window-curtains beginning to burn. I grabbed a pair of blankets from the bed, and flinging them on floor and table, pounded and stamped the fire down, hardly knowing what I did. Suddenly I was seized from behind and enveloped in Miles's brown dressing-jacket which he must have snatched off to wrap round me. "Good heavens! — your beautiful hair!" I heard him ejaculate. Another instant and it would have been on fire. Even then I had time to feel it almost too good to be true that he should think my hair beautiful. And it was like a dream to be picked up bodily in Miles's arms and carried out of the room.

He set me down in the corridor. "This is man's work," he said. "I'll have the fire out in two minutes. Go to the nurse and baby. The child's ill with something — I don't know what."

My "first aid" had been of some use after all, for there was left only one little blue serpent playing hide-and-seek in the lace of the curtains. I obeyed Miles, and hurried off to find the nurse and child in my room, where Miles had put them.

"It's all right," I assured the woman. "The fire'll be out in a minute. No great harm done. But the

baby. What is the matter with the baby?" It was half sitting, half lying on her knee, still wrapped in the pink blanket. The nurse had drawn a chair close to the fire, and the child in her arms was breathing in hoarse gasps.

"Croup," the woman said. "That's what frightened me so. She's never had it since I've been with her, but they tell me she nearly died of it once. I was heating some water: she gave one of those gasps, and turning round in a hurry I knocked over the spirit-lamp. Then I lost my head, she was struggling so. Oh, for goodness' sake, Miss, send for a doctor! It's a wonder it did n't wake them all. Yet nobody, only you and the gentleman, have come — not even baby's father. But sometimes he takes a drug to make him sleep since his wife died — perhaps that's why he did n't hear."

"And our corridor's far away from Mrs. Studholme's part of the house where she and the servants are," I added. "I'll go and rouse some one now."

I flew off with a lighted candle; and avoiding a door which I guessed to be Aunt Rosalie's, I went on till I came to a passage which I hoped might lead me to the servants' quarters. Luckily I was right. The door at which I knocked was opened by the one footman of the household, and he promised to "be off in three minutes after the doctor."

"How soon can you get him here?" I inquired.

"Twenty minutes, my lady," was his encouraging answer. "I'll go on my bicycle, and he'll come even quicker on his motor-bike."

I asked for the cook's door, and ventured to wake her, with explanations. We must have as little noise as possible, I said, not to disturb Mrs. Studholme;

but I thought there should be some one in the kitchen to keep a good fire and plenty of hot water in case of need. Then I ran back to my own room and met Miles near the door, he having put out the fire in the nursery.

"Not much harm done there," he announced. "But you — did you burn your hands? You must have."

"Dear me, I have n't had time to think!" I laughed.

"Let me see," he said, and took possession first of one hand, then the other, turning them over, back and palm, examining them carefully.

They looked very small and white in his brown ones, so big and strong; but here and there on the whiteness was a pink smear which meant a burn. "They're beginning to blister," he said. "You must have your hands wrapped up in vaseline or something. I can't be thankful enough that I came in time to save your hair. In another second — it does n't bear thinking of!"

"No, I should n't have liked to lose my hair," I confessed, gravely. "It's my one vanity. Thank you for saving it. But my hands did n't even smart till you put it in my head to think about them. When the doctor comes I can ask him what's best to do — after he's seen the baby. Till then I shan't bother, for I must hold the child and leave its nurse free to do what she can for it. We won't wake Mrs. Studholme. But had n't you better go rouse the father? He must be sleeping soundly, for his room is close to this."

Miles turned away without another word, and I went to relieve the nurse. She was glad to hear of the rekindled fire in the kitchen, and the supply of hot water. There were some simple remedies she had,

but, as she fussily explained, she was not a "trained nurse."

The poor baby sobbed between its gasps, terrified by vague memories of some long ago attack. It clung to me, crying "Mamma, oh, I want my mamma!" so pitifully that my heart swelled, and I almost prayed that the poor bereaved Willy Fairburn might not come while that wail of sorrow rang through the room.

Never before have I held a sick baby in my arms. A wave of love surged out from me to the little soft, clinging creature. I clasped and rocked it, kissing its shining hair, and crooning words of comfort which perhaps it could not understand.

So the father found us; and Miles, who brought him to the door, stood outside, as if wishing to help, but not knowing what to do. Mr. Fairburn wanted to take the little "Rosalie," but, half delirious, she grasped my falling hair, and hid herself under it, refusing to leave me.

It seemed long before the doctor came, but I think it could not have been very long really — scarcely more than the specified twenty minutes. He was a young-faced, eager man. By this time Miles had stolen into the room, as if impelled to be near in case of need; and the doctor, ignoring the boyish Willy Fairburn, questioned the older man. Miles answered quietly that the nurse had been frightened, and that there had been a slight fire, now extinguished; but he hoped that changing from room to room had not harmed the child.

"No, it won't have made much difference," the doctor said. "But we'll get the little thing to bed now. You'll let me put it into yours" — turning to me — "instead of sending it back to the nursery?"

"Of course!" I assured him. "I shall love to have her here."

He would have taken Rosalie from my arms, but again she rebelled and clutched my hair, hiding her face. I had to bend down, and murmur, and plead, before she would consent to be put to bed — then, only by me, and nobody else. I was proud of my conquest, thrillingly proud, tearfully proud; but I did not realize the impression it was creating in the doctor's mind until, a little later, he pronounced the baby out of danger. He turned from me to Miles, from Miles to me, as if putting us together in his mind. "I am very happy to tell you both," he said, "that your little one is better. The worst is over. You may be thankful."

"Oh!" I exclaimed, and hid my face from Miles by turning away and letting the veil of my hair fall between my profile and his eyes. "The baby is not — we are not —" I went on stammering.

"We are not —" Miles came to the rescue, when words failed me, "we are not — so happy as you think. This is not our child. Here is her father — Mr. Fairburn."

"Not your child?" echoed the doctor. "But you are husband and wife, are n't you?"

"Oh, yes," once more Miles began again, to save me the embarrassment of answers.

"And have you no child?"

"No."

"Well, then, all I can say is, this little lady will some day make one of the best and most loving mothers that God ever created to bless our wicked old world."

Miles was silent. We did not look at each other.

I was sorry for him. Perhaps he was sorry for me.

And yet — I would not give up the experience of this night for all the other nights and days of life that lie behind it. In future, when Miles and I are parted forever — as we soon shall be — with two oceans between us, I shall still remember and be glad.

ST. CROSS, *March 8th.*

All those pages I wrote the day after. I did n't stop to realize how many pages they were. I just went on and on, living again moment after moment, hour after hour, as I recorded them. So I have twice lived through that night; and I shall live through it often in future, when I read my Breviary, far away in California. But I have n't time to write more now, for I am leaving St. Cross in an hour. Miles went to London yesterday. He arranged to have a telegram come, calling him away, because, he said, it was n't fair to incommode me for another night. I begged him not to go if his going were for my sake; but he was obstinate, and left by an evening train. I should have liked to go with him; and I think Miles would have consented to take me, but Aunt Rosalie was so grieved at the prospect of losing us both that I stayed. And I would have stopped on for a day or more to please her and to play with the baby, if it had n't been for the dream I had last night. I'm not superstitious, and no dream ever made me change a plan before; but this was different from any other. Not that it was exactly gruesome, or even horrible. It was only mysterious — and irresistible.

I thought that I had been waked up by the roaring

of the sea. I knew that I was at St. Cross, and that Miles had gone away, leaving me alone. I seemed to be lying with my eyes shut, listening to the sea, when suddenly the roaring of the water became articulate. A voice, not like a human voice, was speaking through it, calling to me. "Miles is in danger," it wailed again and again until, slipping out of bed, I found a long black cloak hanging over the chair where Miles's uniform had been, and wrapping it round me, slipped out through the low, open window. I expected to find myself on the lawn, but instead, I had come into a place like a great black cellar, so airless that my lungs labored. There was no sound there, not even the roaring of the sea, until, listening in the horror of great darkness, Miles's voice cried my name, once, twice — "Sandra! Sandra!" I tried to answer, to say that I was coming, but I could neither move nor open my lips. In my agony a cold dew started out on my forehead. I thought I was dying; and some bells that suddenly began to toll, then to change from tolling to chiming, were like the bells of another world. They gave me courage to break the bands of ice that seemed to hold me in bondage, and I waked. But the dream had been so vivid that, at first, I could not believe I was lying quietly in bed.

My forehead was damp, and I was very cold; but that, perhaps, was only because of the breeze blowing over me from a half-open window. The "bells of heaven" were merely the chimes of a grandfather clock far off in the hall, and the sea had been lashed by the rising wind into a distant tumult.

Every detail of the dream was more or less accounted for, but I could not rid myself of the im-

pression it left. I knew that I would have to obey the call of the voice, and go to Miles. And that is why I am starting this morning.

Luckily I need n't explain myself to him. If I arrive at Brown's Hotel, and then at Culver, to find that nothing has happened, no harm will have been done. I don't suppose anything bad *has* happened, or will; for how often does one have what one calls a "presentiment," and nothing comes of it?

Still — great love may give one a kind of clairvoyance.

I struck a match when I waked up, after the dream, and looked at my watch. It was half-past five — just the dark hour before the dawn; but I knew I should n't be able to sleep again; and besides, it occurred to me that, if I wanted to catch an early train, it would be well to get my packing done before breakfast. So up I got, packed my trunk, and partly packed my dressing-bag. In searching the room for things forgotten, I found on the high mantelpiece an A.B.C. railway-guide which Miles had left behind. Luckily it was n't a Bradshaw, for to that, my untrained intellect is unequal! I discovered the existence of a quite decent train, leaving Sidmouth at nine, and determined to take it. I have been glancing at my watch from time to time as I wrote. It is now ten minutes to eight. I am dressed, all but my hat. Mrs. Studholme — Aunt Rosalie — has her breakfast in bed, at eight. I've been invited to share it with her if I like, and I do like. I'll break the news of my departure, and ask if I may have the carriage to the station. She'll be sorry; but if I tell the dear angel that I've had a bad dream about Miles and feel I must go at once, she's just the sweet, simple,

superstitious sort of woman to bid me Godspeed. I'll promise to wire her from London, and again from Culver, whither I shall start at once if I hear at Brown's Hotel that Miles has gone. He was n't quite sure, when he left, whether or not he'd remain in London, in the hope that Lady Meldon might have come back. He promised Aunt Rosalie to write her a line, and of course she took it for granted that "Sandra" would have a letter too. Sandra herself does *not* take it for granted, but —

Just then Nicolson knocked, and brought me a telegram, dated Court-Culver. It says, "Lady M — not back, so won't wait in town, but she returns in two days, and would, I know, like you to visit her before coming back to Culver."

At any other time, almost, I should love to visit Lady Meldon, but not now. I shall go on to Culver from London this afternoon, though it means my arriving late. I don't mind that; but as Miles might n't like my not being met, I'll wire Miss Timpy to come to Court-Culver for me in the motor. No use my bothering Miles.

CULVER CASTLE,
March 12th.

It was eight o'clock, on the night of the eighth, when my train — the best connection I could make in London — arrived at Court-Culver; and the first face I saw, as I looked out of the window, slowing into the familiar station, was Miss Timpson's.

I thought it had rather an anxious, frightened look, but that, I told myself, might be caused by her standing too close to the train as it ran in.

"Well!" I said, when we met on the platform, and I had patted her on the shoulder, "so you got my telegram, and dared all the dangers of coming to meet me with the motor?"

"I did not come in the motor," replied Miss Timpson. "Not that I was afraid, although I do think that chowfur is a wild, reckless wretch, capable of anything. It was quite a different reason made me to disregard your instructions. The automobile was wanted."

"Sir Miles was using it?" I asked.

"Sir Miles was using it," she repeated, in an odd tone, and a still more odd expression.

"Oh, then it was quite all right. I'm glad he took it," I said.

"It's not exactly all right," remarked my old nurse. "And I don't know, Sandy, as you'll be so glad when I tell you where your husband's gone, and what to do."

"Tell me at once!" I exclaimed.

"I'd made up my mind to wait till after we'd got home—if you can *call* it home," said she. "But when you began with a question about the automobile, I was n't sure Providence did n't point to my breaking the news here."

"Breaking the news!" I echoed, with a leap and then a fall of the heart. "Has—has anything happened to Sir Miles?" And with a pang I recalled the dream-presentiment which had brought me flying home. After the wire from Miles, showing he was safe at that time, I'd begun to think I was rushing off on a false alarm, though all the same I was n't inclined to change my mind, and stop longer at St. Cross.

"Nothing has happened to him *yet*," replied Miss Timpson, with strong and alarming emphasis. "At least not that I *know* of."

"For mercy's sake, tell me what you mean!"

"You've no call to look as if you was dying," she admonished me, "especially as your husband has never seemed to trouble himself too much about you."

I gave her a look, and she went on quickly, almost as if I'd contrived for once to put her in awe of me.

"Well, there's been an accident at the mine."

"The mine!" We always speak of "*the* mine," though there are several within twenty miles of us. "*The* mine" is the Culver coal mine, named in honor of the family, though the Culvers sold it years ago, when they were beginning to be "hard up" — naturally, when they did n't know that there was coal under the rather bare fields for which a Jewish stranger from London offered a good price. To call the mine — when it became a mine — after the Culver family who might have been enriched by it, gave prestige to the property in its youth, before it became the prosperous and well-known mine it is nowadays. But, though the purchase was made in the time of Miles's grandfather, the people who make their living by the mine feel all the pride of tenants in the "family." The men, I've been told, celebrated, not wisely though too well, "their" Sir Miles's triumphs in South Africa and India. He is "our man" to all the mining folk, as well as to his actual tenants; and he thinks as much of them — men, women and children — as they of him. If I went comparatively little, last winter, to the miners' houses, it was because I was afraid of coming upon Miles, and giving him the feeling that his American wife was dogging his footsteps. Neverthe-

less, I did go occasionally; and on Christmas I gave to the children a tree, of which the vicar's wife took on herself, more than willingly, most of the trouble.

I didn't need to ask Miss Timpson *what* mine, for I knew only too well, and began to guess the rest, that concerned me most intimately, even before I'd faltered out the question, "What accident?"

"There's been an explosion, that's all I know. It happened late, before all the miners had come up — that's what I understand from the servants' talk in the house. Somebody ran in a hurry to tell Sir Miles — I don't know who — and I don't know why it was supposed to be *his* business, since the mine is n't his property. But anyhow, he seemed to think it *was* his business, because he took the motor and went off like a shot. I only heard what had happened, after he'd gone. I did n't order the automobile the minute I got your telegram from London, for I was busy just then, and there was plenty of time, so far as I knew. But I heard the sound of the thing, shooting away from the north front, like a comet, just as I was going to send word I wanted it. Then, when I asked, they told me about the accident, and Sir Miles going off. There *was* a noise, a big noise, and a kind of jarring like an earthquake, about the time of the explosion, but you know they're blasting for the new branch of the railroad near Court-Culver, so I guess everybody in the house, including Sir Miles, thought it was that, till the messenger came."

"Oh, I hope and pray he did n't mean to go down the mine!" I sighed, more to myself than Miss Timpson. Then, aloud, I asked her if she knew exactly what had been the result of the explosion.

"Just as I was starting off, the coachman told me

news had come that nobody could get down at first. His expression was, if you want it word for word, that it would have been like going down to hell. But there was something said about an unused shaft they thought of trying, and a rescue party 'd volunteered."

"That must be more than an hour ago," I reflected aloud, "if you heard it when you were leaving the Castle. By this time my husband has gone down into the mine."

"You don't know anything of the sort, Sandy; you can't know," she attempted to console me, fretfully. "Very likely they decided it would be too dangerous, and gave up the idea."

"He would n't give up an idea because it was too dangerous," I said. "Miss Timpson, will you please find my trunk, and take it home with you in the carriage — and this bag. I'm not going to the Castle yet. I shall get a cab and drive to Culver Head." Culver Head is the name of the dark hamlet made up of miners' houses and their few poor shops and drinking places. They have called it "Culver Head" because of a queer formation of rock which is supposed to look like the head of Miles's grandfather who sold the land where the coal was found.

"Oh, Sandy, you'll do no such thing!" exclaimed my old nurse-maid, in a sharp high voice which awed me, as a small girl, when I wanted to play out in the rain or in the hot sun. "I won't have you go!"

"Dear, dear Miss Timpson, I must, and there's no good trying to keep me back," I said in the seldom-used tone which she has learned means a made-up mind. "And I don't want you to come with me. I simply must be alone. If I could stand anybody, I could stand you, but I can't — not anybody at all."

"My lamb!" she whimpered, melting. "I'm afraid for you. If harm should come —"

"How could it come to me? — worse luck!" I exclaimed. "They would n't let harm come to a woman. But I must be there — as near as I can get, to — to know what is happening."

With a sigh that was almost a sob, Miss Timpson turned away, looking suddenly so old that my heart ached; but I did not relent. I could n't have her with me. I found a porter to look after her and my luggage, and then got another to call me a cab. He was talkative and excited, very full of the awful catastrophe a few miles away, subdued only by his great respect for me as a humble belonging of Sir Miles.

"They do say, m' leddy," he announced, "as theer's nigh a hunderd men down. The explosion come after most o' th' chaps was up, or they'd o' ben more."

To get to Culver Head, you go a little way along the road to the Castle, then turn sharp to the right, and drive three miles or more. Many times I have been there. Often I have walked, and the distance has seemed nothing; but this evening it was interminable, though the old cab-horse trotted faster, maybe, than he'd ever gone before. The night was not cold, yet for me there was a chill as of death in the damp, salty wind, and the moon was sharp as a scimitar slashing the black clouds that the wind drove to battle. Always I stared out of the cab-window, and the landscape looked unfamiliar and pitiless, though often I have thought it charming and lovable by day, up to within a mile of the mine: then it begins to be grim; but never so grim as to-night, when the thin white moon tore the clouds to peer coldly down on it. Faintly I saw at a distance a reddish flare that grew

redder as the distance grew less. Between the mine-head and the little clustering town of miners' houses, to give the watchers warmth, some one had built a bonfire in the rocky field, where Culver Head rises among other less strange shapes of stone. As my cab dashed along the road toward this open space — where it must stop — I saw the forms of women, black against the fire-glow which seemed hung on a blue wall of night like a floating curtain of red-gold gauze. The figures moved back and forth, as if aimlessly, and draped in the dark shawls which wrapped their heads, they were like forms of mourners in some old, classic drama. But they were not many, and afterward I knew why. The women whose men were down in the mine had crowded nearer to the pit-mouth, where a thin line of policemen held them back from the gates.

My driver stopped close to a group of other vehicles, carriages, motors, wagons and hired cabs, more than a dozen in all, and among them I saw our car, empty. Not even the chauffeur was there. But I did not stop for more than a flying glance. I did not even go over to the fire near by, to speak with the women. I told my man to wait, for I thought his, as well as all other vehicles, might be needed later on to carry rescued men to their homes; and then I ran as fast as I could go toward the pit-mouth, a hundred yards farther on.

In front of it the big wooden gates had been flung together and bolted. Police from Culver Head and Court-Culver had come in haste, gently but firmly, to push back the frantic crowd of women who beat against the barrier and thrust their bare arms between the wooden bars. The flame and smoke of the explo-

sion, which had run up the shaft, scorching the cage house, had died down now; and after the wailing and weeping which I could imagine in the first terrible panic, a vast silence had fallen, which the suppressed sobbing of anguished women or thin cries of frightened children seemed to accentuate rather than break. I joined the crowd of shawled figures, and was unnoticed among them, until, moving quietly along the fringe, I came upon a woman I knew well.

"Oh, Mrs. Harbord, is — is your husband down there?" I stammered, guilty at heart because it was of my husband, not hers, that I greedily longed to ask.

She started, and turned to me, her peaked face, under the gray shawl that matched her hair, lined and hollow-eyed in the crude light of great gas flares that lit the scene. Other women turned also. Most of them I had met and talked with in happier days. Perhaps all had seen me more than once before, and there could have been none who did not know Sir Miles. They began whispering together in a new wave of agitation. I was sure then of what I had almost been sure before; that he had gone down into the mine with a rescue party.

"It's 'er leddyship!" The miner's wife muttered dully. "No, thank God, my mester be'n't down. He was up with the first gang, but it's my lad. He's theer. I don't ne'er hope t' set eye on him livin' ag'in."

"Oh, I thought your boy was too young. I did n't know he'd begun yet," I said.

"He wur too young. I thowt so, but he did n't — nor his dad. Had his birthday last week, an' thowt hisself a mon. To-day — oh, my God! — was his first day down. And it'll be his last in this wurld."

"Don't say that," I implored her. "Has n't Sir Miles gone down to help?"

"He has that, my leddy — went with the first party — down the owd shaft they doan't use now. None could go this way yet — it be too burnin' hot — and they think them as con would try an' win out by t'owd shaft."

"Then have hope — all have hope in my husband," I cried aloud. "Remember what he did in Africa and India. He can't fail."

"Aye, but 't is different wi' us, m' leddy," explained one of the other women. "Sir Miles is a foine soldier, and us wur glad enough to have him here, helpin' wi' our mesters, but 't is soldierin' he knows, an' he con do no more 'n our men, mebbe not so much as some. Mayhap he woan't win through hisself."

"How long ago did the rescue party go?" I asked, feebly; for it seemed as if a hand on my throat were choking my breath away.

"They must o' ben down the biggest part of an hour, now, and nowt heern on 'em yet," a third woman informed me. "Theer's another lot makin' ready now to try their luck."

I looked round, my eyes wandering sadly over the whole scene in silence, for a moment: the crowd of chalk-faced, shawled women, the whining babies in their arms, and the few wild-eyed children clinging to their skirts: the group of men by the pit-mouth — managers of the colliery, an inspector of police, and a knot of gesticulating figures whom I guessed to be the rescue party forming for a new venture.

"Mrs. Harbord," I whispered, close to the gray-shawled head, "please come away with me a minute

— oh, please! I've something I must say to you alone. You shan't have to be sorry for anything you do for me."

She let me draw her out of the crowd, though her eyes were far away on the men by the pit-mouth. But when I asked what I had to ask, I brought her look back to me with an amazed flash.

"Will you lend me a suit of your boy's clothes? I want to go down with the rescue party. Say yes — quick. I must go, or I shall die — and they would n't let a woman go down."

"No, they 'd not let a woman down," she repeated. "But if tha slid past 'em in th' dark, what good could tha do, m' leddy?"

"None, perhaps," I admitted. "But I love my husband just as you do yours and your boy Tom. If he has to die, I want to be down there to die with him. Look —" I went on when she did not speak — "here's a ring. It's worth a good deal of money — several hundred pounds. If you'll help me, you shall have it to keep, whatever happens, whether I come back or not."

"Foaks 'd think I thieved it," she objected; yet she gazed eagerly at the blue diamond which, in the flaring gaslight, seemed telling its whole strange history in bright, telegraphic flashes. The stone was left for me by my father, but I never loved it, and I felt, somehow, as if he would approve this bargain I hoped to make.

"They shan't think you stole it," I assured her. "In my purse there are some visiting-cards. I'll write a few lines on one, explaining. Afterward, if I don't come back, you can show them when you sell the ring."

"My mester 'll be goin' down wi' this new lot," she sighed. "He wur mad to start with the first, but they 'd enough wi'out. If him an' oor lad dee this night, theer 'll be nane left me but my wee lassie."

"I pray it won't happen, but if it does, you 'll need money. This ring will give you enough to live on for years. Oh, don't refuse me! Take me to your house, and let me have your boy's clothes."

"I will!" she decided, quickly. "Come along, m' leddy. Theer ain't no toime t' lose."

We started to run. Lizzie Harbord's little house is one of those nearest to the mine. In three minutes we were there, in the empty bedroom under the roof, where Tom had slept. She shut the door, and lit a candle, as I began tearing off my fur coat, my hat, my dress and soft silk petticoat, my stays, and high-heeled shoes. On the wall hung Tom Harbord's Sunday clothes. He was a slight boy, not tall, and his things fitted me well enough for this night excursion. I put on no shirt or waistcoat, but tied a red handkerchief round my neck, and tucked the ends into the turned-up collar of the rough coat. The Sunday shoes were too smart, for Tom was something of a dandy for his class in life; but there was a pair of rubber boots for bad weather. I got into these, pulling them on over the trousers, and they disguised the smallness of my feet and ankles. Tom's hat was not big enough to hide my hair; but there was an old slouch hat of the father's, which I found, and pulled down over my face.

"Tha'rt aw roight, m' leddy!" exclaimed the woman, snatched out of herself for the instant by this new excitement. "They 'll let thee pass, no fear. They 're none too partic'lar, toimes like this. God be

wi' thee, and if happen tha meet my Tom, tell 'im his mother's prayers is wi' him."

"Trust me!" I cried to her, already half-way down the narrow stairs. The boots were so big, they made my feet feel heavy as lead, but I ran fast, in spite of them, and luckily caught up with a party of men and two boys who were being passed through the gates by the police. I was allowed to go in with the others. We were volunteers, and were to join the rest of the party which, headed by the youngest of the colliery managers, was about to go down into the mine by an old shaft, unused for years.

They had fitted up a temporary means of descending in a cart which they had attached by ropes to the old machinery and winding-gear of a vanished cage. It was big enough to hold safely but six at a time, and those who had relatives below were given first chance — five of us, besides the young manager. Mrs. Harbord's son was among the entombed ones, and the boy's father took his place among the first three. When the manager asked me, as I pushed forward — head bent and face in shadow — if any one of my family was there, I nodded, with a stifled sob. I dared not trust my woman's voice to answer. They let me join the others, and each one of us got a miner's lamp.

It was a moment when one's own life seemed of small account. Otherwise I might have turned coward, in going down. But as I recall my own feelings then I was not afraid. The dark pit, and the strangeness and mystery of the whole scene, brought back my dream, and I seemed, as we slid down and down, in our makeshift cage, to be plunging into the same dream once more. I could even hear, or I

fancied it, a sound of bells such as I had heard in the dream. But perhaps it was only a ringing in my ears, for as we plunged into blackness, faintly starred by our little lamps, I had a slight sense of suffocation and giddiness. I prayed to God not to let me faint, and fail in my errand. If these men thought me a coward, they would send me back. When there was something to do, I hoped to be well again. I cared nothing for what might happen to me, if only I could reach Miles; but I did not mean to let him know who I was. I would help him if I could—but above all, my one great longing was to be by his side. If he lived, I would live; but if he died, I wished to die with him.

As we were landed, with a slight crash, at the bottom of the old shaft, dimly—as through a roaring of waters—I heard the men saying to each other that the “gas had got here before them.” But the lights still burned. We could breathe, though there was a weight on our chests, and a tightness in our foreheads.

The manager, who had once studied as a doctor (I had learned that in the winter), was the first out, and holding up his lamp, he strained his eyes through the darkness. No one seemed to know much about this part of the mine, superseded by newer workings; but Jim Harbord remembered more than others. There were two passages, stretching away into darkness; but one, he said, had fallen in. We could only go along to the right, and later our way would branch off into one of two galleries leading from the workings now disused to those of the present day. We followed him, he and the other men calling out from time to time; but no answer came to them except a

dull, booming echo. And the air grew heavier with every step we took.

By and by we reached the parting of the ways, which Jim had prophesied. One gallery, he thought, was a short cut, but the explosion at the other end of the mine had caused much of the roof to fall in, and on the ground lay debris of coal and rotten timbers. The other gallery, a longer and more winding path to our destination, was clearer. The manager and Jim Harbord were inclined to think we had best take it, but it was a question whether the first rescue party might not have passed along the supposed short-cut, before the roof gave way.

Something told me that this had happened; and because I dared not speak lest my voice betray and cause my dismissal, I suddenly resolved not to await the general verdict. Miles had been the leader of the first party, I felt sure. And when the men spoke of a short cut, he would have taken it against every difficulty or danger.

No one noticed me as the quick, eager discussion went on. I edged toward the gallery upon which the backs of the group were turned at the moment; and thanking my rubber boots for noiselessness, I climbed stealthily over the heap of fallen coal, threading my way through a forest of broken timbers. I thought, as I picked my way along, less and less cautiously as the distance increased between me and my companions, that, if I failed to find Miles, I might have to turn and come back, following the direction the others had taken. It occurred to me, too, that I might be asphyxiated, or lost in a labyrinth of black galleries, to die of starvation and thirst; yet my mind was too bent on success to be conscious of personal fear.

Sometimes I had to crawl on hands and knees. Often I slipped between great wooden props, broken, and tangled so closely together that a big man could hardly have got through. But at last my straining eyes caught a faint, flitting gleam of light far ahead. Still I dared not cry out, but hope gave me a new spurt of strength and courage. I slid down a precipice of coal, fell, picked myself up and fell again, this time losing my hat and putting out my lamp. Groping among the debris, I retrieved the hat, and pulled it down over my head again for disguise; but I could not find my lamp, and if I had, could not have relighted it.

Still, I saw the moving light ahead, and let it guide me, though I tripped here and there in the darkness underfoot. There appeared to be only one lamp, and that seemed strange; but as I drew nearer, it was no longer strange. A tall man was carrying the limp form of a boy in his arms, and leading a shadowy, lampless figure that grasped his coat, and stumbled after him. Another moment, and a lifting of the head that bore the lamp showed me a chin I could not mistake — the brown, cleft chin I had looked up to as I tied a white necktie two nights ago, a million miles away in peaceful Devonshire.

"Thank God!" I muttered under my breath. He was alive, and so far safe! It would be almost impossible for him to pass by the way that I had come, quite hopeless with the boy in his arms; yet I knew he would not give up; nor would he leave the boy. Somehow he must win through! and I thought to keep close without letting myself be seen. I would follow, and when I was sure Miles had gone safely up to the good, bright world, I too would try to go.

If I failed — why, even so I would not regret that I had come. And if, when Miles had escaped, I too got safely out of the mine, he perhaps need never know the story of this night. Only Lizzie Harbord knew, and she would keep the secret if I wished. She would show the card on which I had explained the ring, but nothing more.

I was thinking these things as I hid behind a great fallen beam, where I hoped the light from Miles's lamp would not find me when he passed. But suddenly, not ten yards behind me where I crouched, there came a tremendous splitting noise like wood giving way under strain, and this was instantly followed by a roaring sound as of tons of coal falling. A thick, vile dust poured into my nostrils and throat. I believed for a moment that we were all doomed to death — that this choking was the beginning of the end.

The thought flashed into my mind like a light in darkness: "We shall enter the next world together, and perhaps he may not dislike me there. He will understand everything without my telling."

But death did not come. I heard a shout, not in Miles's voice, but Miles's voice answered — "Don't give up, Dennis. We're shut in both ways now, but they'll have us out sooner or later. We can't be far from the old shaft where I came down. Trust your pals! They'll save you yet."

"I'm done, sir! I cawn't foight no longer," the other voice answered, breaking into a weary sob.

"You're not done, unless you think so," Miles said, bravely. "Why, you've held out through all the worst, when men stronger than you broke down. Keep up now. Let's try and bring this boy back

to life. There's air enough to breathe here. It's better than farther back; the men will dig us out, I tell you, and we'll have strength enough in us maybe to help save the others."

I guessed from this that there had been another caving-in of the roof farther back. And the rest of my party had gone on the other way. Others who came later would follow their example. I saw, what Miles could n't see — not knowing all I knew — that, if the other gallery, the longer way round, was still clear, everybody would take that way. No one would think of our being here until too late; and this airless black cell would be our grave.

By and by, if I had to see Miles suffer, and when I too began to suffer, this hopeless knowledge would rend my soul. But now I could not think far ahead clearly. The important thing was that I was near my love, and would die beside him. There was no need to hide myself any longer, since we were doomed to die. I had not strength or courage to die alone, since for the asking I could have the comfort of Miles's presence. And I thought that as earthly things mattered little to him or me, in this last hour, he would not be very angry or scold me for coming down to find him in the mine.

For the first time I ventured to give him another name than "You." "Miles!" I cried softly, in the thick silence that answered his last words to his fainting companion.

I saw him start, and look round incredulously, as if he thought his ears had cheated him.

"Did some one call?" he asked, in a clear, loud tone.

"It's I — Sandy," I answered, and stole forward

so that he could see me dimly, like a ghost, in the faint light of his miner's lamp.

"Am I dreaming — you?" he said. "If I'm delirious already —"

"No," I cut him short. "I am really here. But it was a dream that brought me."

I came close to him and took off my hat, for I was hot, stiflingly hot. And almost mechanically I put up my hand to loosen the handkerchief I had tied round my neck.

"You are dressed like a boy!" he said.

"Yes, I borrowed Tom Harbord's clothes."

"Tom Harbord! I've brought him here. I hoped to save him. He was unconscious from the fire-damp — and he has n't waked up. John Dennis was the only other one with life enough to move — and he's given in now. Better so, perhaps, for them both if we've got to die — no suffering for them. Are you sure I'm not dreaming — you? My head's rather queer."

"I'm sure. But last night I dreamed something awful happened to you, in great darkness, and — I could n't stay on at St. Cross afterward. It was too real! I borrowed these clothes because I knew they would n't let a woman come down. I passed with the others. But the men with me have gone another way, toward the place where the explosion was — I think, Miles, they'll never find us. Say you don't mind my being here with you?"

"Mind!" he echoed. "A strange word to use! You — may have to die here. There's nothing I can do to save you." His voice shook. It seemed that he was sorry for me. I could not bear to add a feather-weight to his burden, and so, to prove how

little he need wish me back in the midst of life without him, I dared to tell what I had meant to hide.

"I *am* saved," I said, "because I'm with you. That's all I came for — just to find you, and be near you, whatever the end might be. When I caught sight of you a few minutes ago, I thought you were going to escape, and I thanked God. But if we'd both got out I would never have let you know I came down. Now it does n't matter your knowing. We're so close to eternity, both of us. I'm not afraid. I'd give my life ten times over to save yours, but that's not saying much, because life in this world has n't given me the things I wished for most, and life in the next world may. It's almost too good for me to go through the valley by your side, and that's why I asked if you would mind. Perhaps you won't, now I've tried to show you how I feel, and that I won't make the end hard for you by being a coward."

"A coward is the last thing you could be, my little woman — my brave little woman," he said. And oh, he said it in a wonderful voice! — the warm voice, with a deep thrill in it like a 'cello, that I used to hear, when he was delirious, talking to Helène Garde. It thrilled with sympathy and kindness, this voice, if not with love; and to have it calling me "little woman — *his* brave little woman," made me feel like one rising from the dead rather than one about to die.

"Thank you — thank you!" I murmured. "You can't *know* how happy I am to hear you say that."

"Don't!" he exclaimed. "You make me feel a monster of cruelty."

"Oh — why?"

"Because a word or two of mere decent appreciation makes you *happy*. So little as that! It shows

what you've lived through, these last months — what I've let you suffer — what I've made you suffer. Will you forgive me — now?"

"There's nothing, nothing to forgive. How should you think there was — from me to you? I've spoilt your life, and all in vain, because Laurie couldn't be saved, and you needn't have sacrificed yourself if you'd known. Now — death is coming very close. It's almost as if we could hear the beating of his wings. And you mustn't be surprised if I'm glad not to spoil the hour of death for you as I've spoiled months of life."

"If death were an enemy, your companionship would give me courage and strength to face him," Miles said. "For you are true and loyal, as well as brave — the truest and most loyal child that ever lived. But the horrible part is that you must die too — you, so young, with so much to make life happy if you were rid of me."

"Rid of you!" I echoed in a high voice of surprise and protest. But there were no ears save Miles's to hear. The boy and the man he had dragged out of the stifling fire-damp were already fast locked in the sleep which maybe would know no waking. "Rid of you! Why, life wouldn't be life without you. Don't you understand yet that I'd a thousand times, ten thousand times rather die here with you than live in a world empty of you?"

"How can I understand," he asked, "when I've done everything to make you hate me since you first told me you would be my wife?"

"Ah, but you see," I answered before I stopped to think, "I loved you so desperately beforehand!"

"You loved me — beforehand?"

"I ought n't to have told you," I said, quickly. "Lady Meldon saw you would n't be able to go on living in the same house with me if I ever let you find out the truth. But it does n't matter much now, does it? — for we have n't to live in the same house, only in the same heaven — and there must be *heaps* of room there."

"Just at this instant nothing seems to matter much — not even heaven — except knowing what you mean when you say you loved me beforehand and Lady Meldon advised you not to tell. I thought Lady Meldon was my best friend!"

"So she is," I assured him, hurriedly. "That's *why*. She understood you and helped me to understand. She knew I loved you so much that she feared I might make life intolerable to you if — if I showed my feelings. The only thing was to make you think it a kind of bargain — so you would n't feel I gave what you could n't return. I tried not to let you see there was — any heart in the business; but sometimes I must have seemed very silly! Now it can do no harm for you to know the real truth; and oh, what joy it will be to die with it on my lips!"

"What is the real truth?" he asked. "Let me hear quickly lest the end come and rob me of it."

"It's not interesting enough for you to care about," I warned him. "Only, ever since I was a little girl I loved you. I used to keep your photographs and things written about you in the papers. It seemed almost too wonderful to think of seeing you in England. Then, when we did meet, it was the day you came to tell Lady Meldon of your engagement. I prayed for you to be happy — with Comtesse Hélène Garde."

"Yet you saw something which told you I never could be happy with her."

"I was n't certain. I hoped and hoped that after all she might make you happy."

"You said nothing of what you saw, even to Lady Mel."

"No, of course not. I could n't be a traitor. And I meant you never to know."

"Why? Tell me why, now, with your own lips. If you cared for me, why didn't you tell, anyhow after she was dead? Have you never heard the proverb that hearts can be caught in the rebound — or would n't you have cared for mine to come to you in such a way?"

"I'm afraid I'd have cared for it to come to me in any way," I confessed, humbly, and not ashamed of my humility. "But I was sure I could n't win it by *cattiness*! Oh, I was sure it was n't for me to win by any means at all. All I asked was your good, and I thought it would be good for you to go on believing in her always. Keeping your ideal seemed the one bright spot left, and I'd have died twice over rather than rob you of it. Any honorable person must have felt the same, so there's no credit to me. Besides, there was poor Laurie. Would any one, with a human heart, have made mischief between you and him? I think too well of human nature to believe that! It was easy to promise him not to tell, for nothing would have induced me to tell in any case. And if I could have kept him from speaking out at the last, I would."

"I know," Miles said gently. "I know how I misunderstood you that night when he was dying. He told me — many things after you'd gone."

"Not — not what I've told you to-night?" I stammered. "Not that I — *cared?* He promised he would n't tell that."

"He kept his promise. So *he knew* then?"

"Yes, he knew. He guessed when you were ill."

"I might have guessed too if I had n't been a blind fool. But I was not too blind to find out other things — concerning myself. You've told me something about yourself. Now it's my turn. While there's time I'll tell you what I found out as I grew better — when I came to myself in more ways than one — and what I've gone on finding out every day since. At first I called the new feeling treachery and other evil names. But when Laurie made his last confession I knew that I'd had — the right instinct all through. Now do you guess what it is I have to tell you?"

"No," I said, "I can't think what you could have done which made you call yourself a traitor."

"I was a traitor to a dream — before I knew that it was a false dream. You thought — every one thought — that when Helène was killed I nearly went mad for love of her and the loss of her. I never expected to tell any one this side the grave that that was n't true. But you have a right to my truth. And I give it to you. I nearly lost my reason in shame and remorse because — my heart would n't break for her. It could n't. I did not care as I ought to have cared. I hated, I loathed and despised myself for not caring more. I called myself shallow — unworthy, no true man. But I could n't change my soul. And when I came out of the strange, dazed state, almost like stupefaction, that I fell into after the news came, I found myself suffering more for Laurie, than for — the loss of *her*. I had to face my soul, and realize

that what I'd believed an overwhelming love had been mere passion for a beautiful, siren woman — such infatuation as a man like me should be ashamed to feel, untempered by purer and deeper feeling. I wrestled with the horror of finding myself out. The knowledge of what I was, and what my friends thought me, made an intolerable contrast, a hideous mixture which turned to a corroding poison. . . . It's true, I did n't love you. It's true, I despised you for marrying me for an unworthy reason — as I supposed. What a prig — what a prig I was! As if my reasons for taking what *you* had to give were worthier."

"Oh, they were," I broke in eagerly. "It was for your brother's sake."

"Don't defend me. I don't deserve it. I deserve nothing good — and I knew that, at the time. But I soon began to see that good had come to me, good which I did n't deserve. That good — was you. I could n't help beginning faintly to realize what you were. And I could n't reconcile the glimpses I got of your real nature with the estimate I'd formed of it — in my denseness — because of your willingness to marry me. If I'd dreamed ever so dimly then, of what you've told me now, what light would have been thrown upon darkness! But I did n't dream, I did n't guess. I tried to fix my thoughts upon the image of *Helène*, to love her dead as I had thought I loved her living. I tried to justify myself in my own eyes. And when I felt myself wavering, wanting your companionship, finding it sweet, I forced myself to see you as I'd once seen you — an ambitious, heartless girl, wanting to buy some sort of position with your money. I used to say, 'There's no other explanation of her marrying me, a man she hardly knew.' I

thought you were waiting for Laurie's death, not to be called unfeeling by the world. Then you'd expect to lead a different life, a life of pleasure. But my illness came. I'd been feeling desperately queer for a long time, struggling against it. That afternoon, when I saw Helène's miniature, it was like a blow across the eyes. The man who painted it had made her look like a beautiful cruel Circe. A voice seemed to shout in my head. 'She turned him into a beast, and she would have turned you into a beast!'

"That was the last I knew. But in delirium I went back to the days when I loved her. I lived over again the old passion. I remember something of it now, I knew I was calling to her, and it seemed as if she came. I forgot that she was dead. One does forget in delirium. Sometimes, though, for a few minutes I was sane enough, though I did n't speak. There were times, even, when I knew I had been mistaking you for Helène. Yet I could n't or would n't ask questions. But when at last I began to understand your forbearance, your goodness, your sweetness and devotion, to the brute who had done nothing but heap injuries upon you, I could n't shut the door of my heart in your face. It was then I first loved you."

"Oh, Miles!" I cried. "Now it must be I who dream."

"No, this is no dream," he answered, almost harshly. "It's reality, and we're going to die soon — you are dying for me. Would that it were the other way round! At least I might atone a little — a very little — for the past."

"You've made me the happiest creature on earth, soon to be the happiest in heaven!" I answered.

"It won't be much change for you to become an

angel," he said, in that warm, wonderful voice which I had thought he kept only for Helène. "I've known for weeks what you are: since the night Laurie died, though I'd suspected more than once before, and struggled for my own selfish sake, against the suspicion. Better than ever I know you now, for I know what I did n't guess before, that you love me. I know that loving me, you bore a martyrdom for my sake — a daily martyrdom. And when you let me hold your hands, and kiss your lips, calling you Helène! My little saint — my white angel, I was n't worthy to kiss your feet, and I'm not worthy now."

"Oh, Miles, that's *exactly* what I've thought about myself with *you!*" I cried. "And if you would kiss me, I should die happier than I ever lived."

"Kiss you!" he echoed; "I'll kiss you till I kiss your soul away, and mine with it."

We leaned toward each other in the dim light of the miner's lamp. He caught me in his arms, and kissed me with a kiss which it seemed had no beginning and need have no end. Yet after all he broke it short to hold me from him, and look in my eyes. "My God! if you knew what it cost me not to kiss you at St. Cross!" he panted. "I loved you — I wanted you — so much. I thought you were not for me. I strengthened myself against temptation, by thinking you hated me, and I deserved it: that you hated me so much, you would n't share my bright hours, though you'd lived through the dark ones by my side. All you wanted was to leave me, and forget you had ever called me your husband."

"And all that time I was dying to have you kiss me, and sick with misery because you did n't — because I thought you'd never take me in your arms,



"'IT'S BETTER TO DIE—SINCE YOU LOVE ME'"—*Page 329*

never even touch my forehead with your lips, for good-bye."

"Poor lips that were thirsty for yours, and for your sweet eyes! — poor arms that ached to hold you, poor hands that longed to touch your hair — your beautiful, wonderful hair! And we were so near each other, all that night — with only a door between!" He caught me close again, and kissed my hair and eyes. At last, I lay with my head against his shoulder, happier than I had known a human soul, still in a human body, could ever feel.

"We are nearer together now than we could ever have been in any other place than this," I said. "Nothing can part us. Death least of all."

"If it had not been for this, you and I would have said farewell, and never have known each other's heart," he answered. "It's better to die — yes, even better for you, since you love me. I'm glad now that you came, though I can't save you from death, beloved."

"We'll drink the cup together," I said.

"And afterward? — What do you believe?"

"In God's mercy and infinite love, that has put love into our hearts and let us see its glory, even here."

"Yet — if I could take all the suffering from you!"

"I shan't feel the suffering."

"Nor I. Then let the end come when it will!"

"Yes. Because it's only the beginning of life."

The lamp that had been burning dimly and more dimly, flickered and went out. He held me close in his arms, as the darkness fell over us like a black curtain.

After that, for a long time, we did not speak, but sometimes we talked fitfully, and not always of our-

selves. He told me how he had tried to reach the imprisoned miners; how a wall of coal fell in great blocks in front of him, and he had found only the boy, Tom Harbord, with the old man, Jim Dennis, who had been wounded on head and shoulder by falling props and lumps of coal.

"They will get to the men the other way," he said, "when they can use the cage again. Perhaps they are there now. But we are shut up in a little prison of our own. We must n't hope they'll come to us."

"How many hours shall we last?" I asked, steadily, because in his arms I had no fear.

"That depends on the air we have left to breathe. Do you feel the gas?"

"I don't know. I'm used to it now. My head aches, that's all."

"Are you growing drowsy?"

"Yes, a little. Are you?"

"Not yet. My heart beats too fast with its new happiness. Go to sleep in my arms, darling. I'll hold you. And at last, when I —"

"Listen!" I exclaimed. "Do you hear something — very far away? A voice calling —"

Miles did not answer me, but shouted a reply to that distant call which, perhaps, we only fancied.

After that, I remember no more, until the knocking began — knocking that meant men's axes and shovels breaking down our prison wall.

They tell me that it was twelve hours before they broke through the mass of coal and timber, a hole big enough to crawl through, and find us.

By that time Miles and I had fallen into that strange, drugged sleep which coal gas brings.

He and I lay a little apart from Tom Harbord and Jim Dennis they say: but I knew nothing till I waked on my own bed, and saw Miles and Miss Timpson, and Dr. Henderson, all bending over me.

Then, the first question I was asked was, "Is it a dream?" And Miles, knowing what I meant, answered without a pause, "No, my dearest, it's not a dream. It's as true as the heaven you and I are going to find on earth."

The second question — but I didn't ask it just then, because I was selfish enough to forget every one but Miles — was about Tom Harbord. I was very happy when Miles said that he was alive, and would get well. Jim Dennis, too, would recover — so Miles had done a good work, and saved two lives, not counting mine — for he insists that it was I who saved his. Nearly all the other men were saved, too. Oh, it was a very good awakening for me — like a new and beautiful world!

For two days they kept me in bed — that stern old nurse of mine, and the doctor, and Miles. But it was interesting and amusing to see the change in Miss Timpson, as Miles won her over, and how she almost purred with joy at every loving word or look she detected him in the act of giving her "Sandy."

"Sandra" is his name for me now. We have both laughed, and sighed, over the uncompromising "You." Hearing him speak the name I always longed for, and his dear way of saying it, not to mention a hundred dear words sweet as flowers of Paradise, have made me as well — no, a thousand times better than ever.

Is n't it strange, my Book? — all these months Miles has been haunted by something I said to him once —

just these words: "Oh, I didn't know there were rules for friendship or love!" They made him begin to wonder, he says, if I were really the sort of girl he had mapped me out to be in the coldest and most northern part of his brain.

A dozen times a day he asks if his love can make up to me for everything in the past, and he is never tired of the answer, though it's always the same: "There's nothing in the world your love could n't make up for, over and over again."

He has had the most beautiful idea, which would make me more sure of his love than anything else could, if I needed assurance. Because our wedding-day was n't like a real wedding-day, he has asked me to go away with him for a true honeymoon, before we leave for Astra together; and I am to take my wedding-dress, and put it on, veil and all, for him to see. He says that the eyes of his soul did n't see it, and me in it, that dark day of rain in Chelsea, when I became his wife in name.

"Now you're the bride of my heart," he says. "And I want a real wedding-day. I won't be cheated of it."

So I have consented, and we're going to-day, to some place he has chosen. Its name is to be a surprise; but any place would be Paradise with Miles. I am not taking Miss Timpson. He and I are going away alone together, and with my own hands I have packed the wedding-dress and veil in which I was so unhappy, all by themselves, in a little trunk of their own. Miles is to give me a wreath and bouquet of fresh orange blossoms. He has telegraphed somewhere for them.

A whole week we shall be gone; and coming back

by way of London we shall stop and tell Lady Meldon how heavenly happy we are — how heavenly happy we expect to be, while we live.

Now, whenever I shut my eyes, I can see the blue sea, and a ship gliding through it, taking me with Miles to our new life together in Astra.

I mean to try and be a true helpmate for him, so that I may be worthy of the love which has flooded the darkness with light.

Oh, but I shall have many things to write, when next I have time to open this dear Book — my friend through everything — my “Bride’s Breviary!”

THE END



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